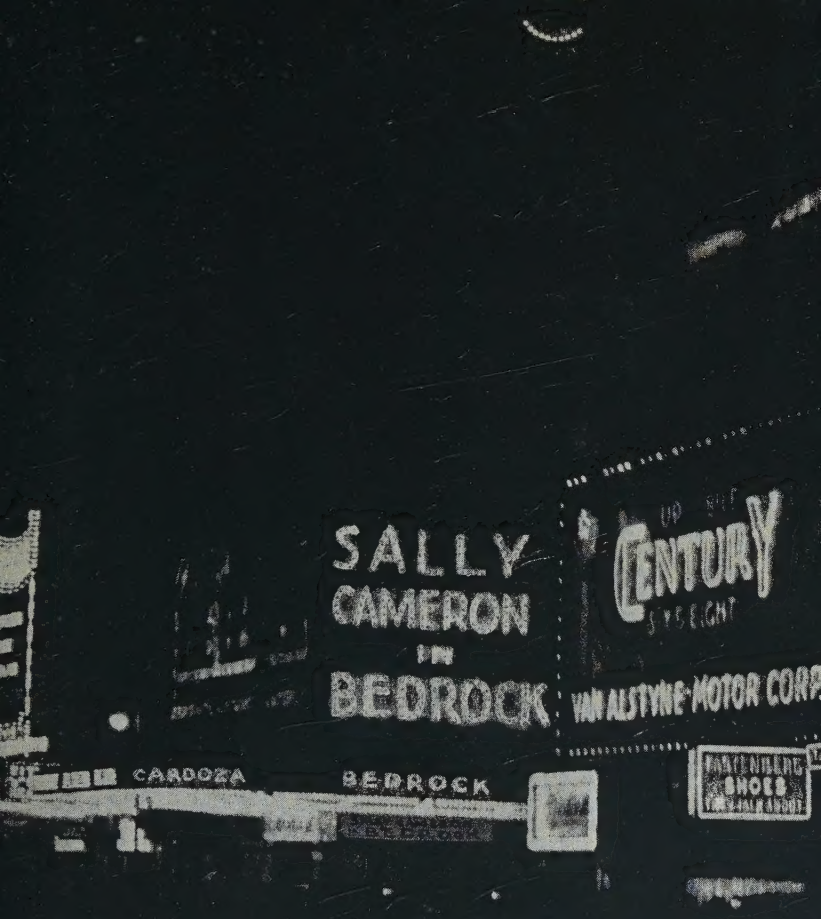
Maxwell House Coffee
"Good to the last drop"
SQUIBB'S
DENTAL
CREAM
PARK


SALLY
CAMERON
IN
BEDROCK
CENTURY
VAN ALSTYNE MOTOR CORP
CARDOZA
BEDROCK

NOTE:
Broadway Interlude **is the first of a trilogy of novels by the same authors, dealing with life in New York. The next two volumes:** ***Park Avenue Zoo*** **and** ***Diversities on Lower Fifth*** **are in preparation.**

Other Books by the Same Authors

ACHMED ABDULLAH

They Were So Young
The Honourable Gentleman and Others
(crowned by the French Academy, 1925)
Shackled
Alien Souls
Night Drums
The Swinging Caravan
Steel and Jade
The Thief of Bagdad
Lute and Scimitar

FAITH BALDWIN

Signposts—(a book of verse)
Three Women
Alimony

Broadway Interlude

ACHMED
ABDULLAH
&
FAITH
BALDWIN

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To
JEAN WICK
our third and not very silent partner

CHAPTER ONE

HEAT crushed Broadway. Heat crushed the melting, spongy asphalt. Heat crushed the fretwork of windows and lettered signs and fire-escapes and water-tanks and ventilators. Heat crushed decency. Heat crushed ambition.

Heat could not crush hunger.

"Gotta eat!" exclaimed the older actor. Tall he was, lean, rat-faced, with sagging mouth and bluish jowl.

"You've sed it!" agreed the younger actor, a handsome enough boy though his small eyes were too close together. He stood there, hatless, his honey-colored hair permanently waved. "Gotta eat!"

"And how!"

"*But* how—you mean, kid!"

"Jess'—ain't it hot?" The other tore off his gaudy necktie and put it in his pocket.

"You've sed it! Been the rounds?"

"Sure. Every damned theatre. From the Bowery to Harlem. Town's dead."

"What about the Guv'nor?" asked the younger.

"Cardoza? Not a chance. His last play was a flop."

"Rita Andrews' fault, wasn't it?"

"No. Play's fault. Guv'nor offered me a part."

"Me too."

"Hell of a fat part. But I wouldn't take it. Too much sense. Knew the play would be a flop. I know plays."

"You've sed it!"

"Guv'nor ain't the wizard he useter be."

"You've sed it! I wouldn't act for him if he offered me a thousand smackers a week!"

"Nor me either! Why—listen . . ."

Suddenly he interrupted himself.

"Say!" he called as a short, pale, stout man turned from Forty-Fourth Street toward the stage entrance of the Cardoza theatre—the theatre which Leo Cardoza had built for himself, which was his monument, his life, clouted out of brick and bronze and bragging, pretentious stone—"Say, Deane! Guv'nor hasn't a bit of a part kicking round loose—just to tide me over . . .?" His voice trailed off, thin with anxiety—

"Nothing doing, McFadden!"

And Deane Powers, Cardoza's casting director, hurried inside and up the stairs.

"Guv'nor's come?" he asked the telephone girl.

"Sure. Been at work since nine. In the small studio."

The small studio, on top of the theatre, did not deserve its name. For it was forty by forty; overloaded with furniture in a fantastic mixture of Renaissance and Hispano-Mauresque, a reckless hodge-podge of early New England and late Grand Rapids. The immense window, which opened on Broadway's sweep and roar with a gorgeous glow of color, had illuminated, centuries earlier, the palace of a grandee of Spain, far up in the Guadarrama Mountains. The tables were cluttered with all sorts of bric-a-brac, statuettes, bronzes, ivories, Michelangelo flanked by Woolworth, ultra-modern Viennese atrocities cheek-by-jowl with ancient Egypt. The whole place seemed like a cross between a cathedral and a bawdy-house . . . and more of the cathedral touch was being supplied by Leo Cardoza himself, with his smooth, cleverly benign, clean-shaven face, his eloquent, priestly hands, and, hiding his light-gray suit, his silk robe of royal purple which, cut like a cassock, seemed to breathe Christian defiance at the Hebraic beak of a nose. Not a bad-looking man. And, strangely, a large wart on his left nostril and a pronounced limp gave him an added air of distinction.

The desk at which he worked differed from the

rest of the studio. It was an epitome of efficiency, with everything in proper order, pencils, writing pads, pins, clips, one part covered with a pile of printed and typewritten matter.

For these last few weeks, often far into the night, he had been reading plays, novels, magazines in a frantic search for dramatic material; was reading now, eagerly, interestedly, paying no attention to Jack Griggs, his confidential secretary, who stood beside the desk, holding out a telegram.

Griggs had grown old and frustrated in the Cardoza service: a gray man with a gray voice; avid, footling, sex-ridden. He might have been a pimp—or a hard-shell Baptist preacher; combined, possibly, both qualities.

"The telegram, Guv'nor—" he began for the seventh time.

Cardoza took the yellow envelope. He did not immediately remove the message. He disliked telegrams. The thrust of a finger beneath the flap—and you might encounter disaster, failure, tidings of death. He hated all three and feared them. But chiefly death, the supreme disaster, the last failure. And of lesser failures he had had too many of late. His bank account told the tale. So did his dimmed fame. Well—he must fill his bank account, must refurbish his fame. And he saw a way: here, in

the playscript, which he tapped with a rosy fingernail.

"Great stuff!" he commented.

"Foster's play?"

"Yes. Needs a little rewriting. But it has the essentials: truth, beauty, imagination, real guts. I've made up my mind to do it." His keen, bright, black eyes, eyes which quested, eyes which doubted, were lit with enthusiasm. "Sure-fire success!" he added.

"The telegram—" Griggs reminded him.

The other did not seem to hear.

"Did you 'phone Foster to come to the office?" he went on.

"He'll be here at noon."

"Find out anything about him?" For, master psychologist, Cardoza liked to have a mental and moral measure of his antagonists, as he called playwrights or actors, before he faced them on the theatrical battlefield: talking terms.

"I dropped in at the *Lambs* last night. Asked a few discreet questions . . ."

"I know how discreet you are!" cut in Cardoza with a laugh. His features, Napoleonic, artificially pearl-pale, looked suddenly young, mischievous and malicious as a street Arab's. "As tactful as a professional reformer! As subtle as an elephant with the whooping cough!" He sobered abruptly;

frowned menacingly. "Why, in heaven's name, did I ever hire you?"

This being the kind of rhetorical query to which Griggs, during his long, loyal servitude, had become accustomed, there was no reply; and Cardoza continued briskly:

"Well—what did you find out, Jack?"

"He's young," came the secretary's measured words. "He's from the West, has been a reporter . . ."

"This his first play?"

"Except for a few vaudeville sketches. He's ambitious and clean living—has, as far as I could ascertain, no woman entanglements . . ."

"You're all right, Jack," said Cardoza with a complete change of tone, with the elfin, caressing smile which he kept for praise or beguilement. "What would I do without you? You're my second self." He took a roll of bills from his pocket and peeled off several yellowbacks. "Here, young fellow! I don't like your necktie. Get yourself a new one."

Griggs took the money. He was overworked and underpaid. He received, in that office, from the man who dominated it, harsh injustice and frequent abuse. Yet every so often would come to him one of these generous presents—fifty dollars, a hundred, two hundred, even more—accompanied

by a strange, almost womanish tenderness. Always a gift. Never a just payment of debt. But Griggs preferred his employer's way. He derived from it, as now, a strong, emotional reaction.

His gray face was momentarily suffused with color. A little huskily, he said:

"Thanks, Guv'nor."

A pause. Then again:

"This telegram . . ."

"Who's it from?"

"Denny Moore."

Cardoza's face darkened. Moore was the road manager of *Week-End Husbands,* a drama written by Cardoza for Rita Andrews, his greatest star. It was now in Chicago, in the last three weeks of its run, an artistic success but a financial failure. Each week had spelled a dead loss. But stubbornly, doggedly, he had kept it on the boards.

"Cost me a quarter million," he complained, fingering the slip of paper.

"I know." Griggs' thin, weak mouth twitched with grim amusement. "Ben Levi's downstairs now, toting up the losses and moaning like a stuck pig."

"To hell with Ben!" Suddenly, startlingly Cardoza's fist crashed on the desk. "He's always bellyaching about money—*my* money! And—*my* play!" He rose. He paced up and down. "A great play—written with my heart's blood . . . and

Rita's glorious in it, I tell you! She's a wonderful little girl—has everything an actress needs: youth, beauty, sex appeal, emotional pull . . ."

He read the telegram; and, almost in the same breath, speaking about the same Rita, continued with a roar:

"Why—damn her—she's no good! What the hell does she think she is? Hasn't a spark . . . no beauty, no sex appeal, no . . . nothing—nothing —except what I taught her! Every trick I taught her—every gesture! She's my creation! I took her from the gutter—and—by God—I'll kick her back into the gutter—where she belongs!"

Griggs knew what the telegram contained: a message from Denny Moore that Rita Andrews, disdainful, imperious, refused to continue with the play unless the leading man, with whom she had quarreled, was dismissed and another sent to Chicago immediately.

He sighed, staring at Cardoza whose lips were still issuing a steady stream of foul invective. There was no telling what the man might do in one of his rages. Shrewd and practical as was his nature beneath his pyrotechnical displays of temperament, temperament which he could turn on and off like a tap, there occurred moments when, for his own artistic or emotional satisfaction, he would upset any god's quantity of applecarts without counting

the cost. The cost—thought Griggs—Rita Andrews . . . she was essential to the Cardoza theatre; was, as the Guv'nor had often been heard to remark, "money in the bank." Other producers were angling for her with fat bait. Suppose the Guv'nor had a row with her—suppose she quit . . . ?

Then, as suddenly as it had come, Cardoza's rage left him. For he, too, had counted the cost.

So he smiled a smile of understanding, of tolerance, even of sweetness; and Griggs read the signs —Griggs who, as soon as he saw the smile, was relieved as well as vastly amused, who knew him like a book, who could have foretold to a word, to a subtle intonation, what was coming:

"I was wrong, Jack. Shouldn't have lost my temper. She's a child. All actors are children—playing at make-believe—playing at *grande dame,* soldier, hero, villain. They must be treated like children. A touch of the birch today—a lollipop tomorrow. Very well. Rita shall have her lollipop. Dear little Rita. . . . Tell Deane to come up."

Griggs suppressed a laugh. He telephoned down to the business office while Leo Cardoza, serene, imperturbable, smoothing his thick, white hair, turned back to the play on his desk, penciling a note here and there, trying over a line aloud to hear how it sounded, enjoying the pulse and throb of his own fine, resonant voice—a voice which

could infuse romantic warmth and charm into a grocery order.

A few moments later Deane Powers, the casting director, came in; a decent, clever, rather spineless person, out of Harvard into Broadway, with Broadway in the ascendency.

Cardoza handed him the telegram; asked agreeably:

"Whom would you suggest, Deane? It's summer. Broadway is lousy with lean-stomached actors. We should have no trouble."

"Graham Steele's in my office now. He wants a part for next season."

"Good man. Send him up."

Powers hesitated, teetering on his plump, pinched toes.

"Steele's expensive, Guv'nor."

"How much?" Cardoza shot out, like the bark of a sea lion.

"Nine hun- . . . ? Why—the bastard—I'll talk to him . . . and he'll get no nine hundred—not by a third!"

Then, when Powers had left, Cardoza addressed his secretary, demanding indignantly:

"Nine hundred for a badly cured ham! Can you beat it, Jack? And he's a rotten actor—absolutely God-awful! I wouldn't give him a part on a bet!"

He paused; went on:

"But we haven't the time to pick and choose—with Rita in one of her sulks. Got to be Steele, eh?"

"I guess so."

"Still—nine hundred . . . ? He should be waiting in an alienist's office—not a producer's! Ever seen him act, Jack? Why—of all the lousy barnstormers that Steele is the . . ."

All at once he broke off the sentence. For Powers had returned, accompanied by a tall, good-looking Englishman.

Cardoza flickered an eye toward Griggs. He wondered: had Steele overheard his last words?

Griggs imagined that he had; turned away to hide his grin. He served his master with an unreasoning, rather tragic loyalty, with a slavish devotion which was the sullen half-sister of love; and the only come-back he permitted himself was an occasional flash of inner merriment at his employer's expense.

The latter saw him turn, knew why, and leveled a vicious look at the lean back in the shiny blue serge suit. Then he smiled at Steele and shook his hand.

"How are you, my boy?" he greeted him cordially. "Sit down."

The Englishman took the indicated chair while Griggs and Powers exchanged a look. They had

often seen their chief in action and were never tired of watching him.

Now they heard him continue:

"I've had my eye on you for years. You're a fine artist."

Steele was a little puzzled. Entering the studio, he imagined he had heard . . .

No! he decided. Must have misunderstood. Perhaps Cardoza had spoken of John Steeves, the comedian—or Steers, the juvenile . . .

"Thank you, Mr. Cardoza," he said.

"Going to star you some day. Been waiting for the right play. And I think—yes—I think I've found it."

The other leaned forward, his heart beating fast. He had a good opinion of his histrionic ability. To be starred . . . he deserved it, he considered. Still—to be starred by the Guv'nor himself . . . the Guv'nor so called, in affection or derision or admiration, by every actor and actress up and down Broadway, by all the members of the *Lambs,* the *Friars,* the *Green Room Club,* by cops and newsboys, by taxi drivers and Salvation Army lassies, by drug peddlers, street walkers, dramatic critics, and soda fountain cowboys offering their various wares between Thirty-Fourth Street and Fifty-Third, between Fifth Avenue and Eighth.

The Guv'nor!

Now, for the first time, an epochal first time, Steele used the nickname to Cardoza's face:

"What type of a play, Guv'nor? When will you. . . ?"

"We'll discuss that later on. Meantime I want to put you through your paces. I'm not satisfied with O'Connor, Rita Andrews' leading man. Feel like trying the part for the next few weeks?"

"Gladly."

"Can you leave tonight?"

"Yes, Guv'nor."

"That's bully. You're just what Rita needs. You'll be great team mates—you and she. Hop downstairs—and Ben Levi will give you your contract."

"But . . ."

"Well . . . ?"

Steele was a little embarrassed. It seemed almost a sacrilege to mention money to this man, the Wizard of Broadway, who was offering him a stepping stone to stardom.

"How much—" he stammered, very ill at ease—"how much is in it?"

"How much do you want?"

"Nine hundred a week, Guv'nor. That's what Al Stone gave me last season."

At once Cardoza threw up his hands.

"Nine hundred!" he echoed. "Nine hun- . . ."

He interrupted himself. He marched up and down the length of the studio, his purple robe streaming behind him like a banner, his pale face illuminated with high fervor.

"I have toiled!" he exclaimed bitterly. "I have sweated! I have given myself to the theatre without stint, without hope of reward! I have steeped myself in truth, in beauty! I have labored—desperately! And at every turn I am balked by greed, by the lust of you miserable actors for money, money, money! My boy—" stopping and facing Steele— "I am disappointed in you. I thought you had ambition, passion for the theatre, real devotion to art. And—what do I find you? Ah—nothing but a huckster peddling his wares to the highest bidder! You—" there was a sob in his voice— "you break my heart!"

Again Powers and Griggs exchanged an amused look, and the Englishman flushed, stammered:

"I—I'm sorry, Guv'nor. . . ."

The latter put his hands on the taller man's shoulders.

"My boy," he said softly, "I'm no Al Stone making a fortune from bedroom farces. I'm an artist—not a procurer. I'm poor. Will you take three hundred—from *me?*"

Three hundred? A third of his asking price . . . ?

Still, Broadway was dead—and there was the

unknown play in which the other had promised to star him. . . .

"Very well—" he replied—"if you insist . . ."

"God bless you!" Cardoza's hands dropped from the actor's shoulders. He smiled very winningly. He looked like an affectionate father who has been arguing with a young, refractory son and who, winning out, is a little tired, but tolerant, quietly happy.

"God bless you!" he repeated; and Steele bowed and departed, feeling as if he had received the royal accolade instead of six hundred dollars less in his pay envelope, while the producer, instantly mischievous, turned to his two employees.

"Didn't I get away with that?" he demanded, as eager as a youngster for praise and flattery. "Didn't I pull that off in great style?"

"You've said it, Guv'nor!" laughed Griggs, and he left, followed by the casting director, passing on the way out a maid who was bringing a tray with the ten-thirty breakfast.

For Cardoza seldom ate at the house which he called his home; the house in which his wife lived. He rarely entered this house.

He was now alone. He sat down; carefully, fastidiously, spread the napkin across his plump knees; and proceeded to gorge himself like a child. Then, as he was about to help himself to his fifth slice of

lavishly buttered and bejammed toast, a woman's deep, sonorous voice boomed from a corner door where, through a tapestry, his private elevator connected with the outside world.

"Always making a pig of yourself!" said the voice. "You ought to know better, L. C.!"

Leo Cardoza, who had been chuckling over the encounter with Steele, gave a slight start and, reluctantly but docilely, put down the dripping piece of toast.

"It's only my second slice, Healy," he defended himself.

"Most likely your seventeenth! You never could tell the truth, L. C.! It's an obsession with you!"

And Katharine Healy stalked like a figure of fate into the studio, her expensive, demoded dress almost touching the floor.

CHAPTER TWO

KATHARINE HEALY was nearly six feet tall and thin enough to make even a Broadway flapper appear coarse and beefy by comparison. Her dress—rather defiantly—was of almost mid-Victorian cut, though an observing woman would have sensed the fine, concealed cobwebs of old lace. She had no physical beauty save the clear loveliness of her violet-blue eyes. Yet you could not pass her without looking at her twice. She had that subtle quality called race, the aristocratic heritage from the Irish gentlefolk who were her ancestors, in the strong modeling of her features, in every long line of her body.

More than thirty years she had been at Cardoza's right elbow, sharing his triumphs, sharing his defeats. But few on Broadway had ever heard of her existence. Fewer knew her; none knew her intimately; and some called her the Guv'nor's "mystery woman" . . . which either explains her very well or not at all.

She crossed the room and summoned the servant. "Take the tray, Mary. Mr. Cardoza has finished."

"But—" he protested weakly—"I haven't . . ."

"You have, L. C.!"—always L. C. to her, never Guv'nor . . . perhaps to set herself apart from the rest of the office.

"Damn it all, Healy! You take too much on yourself. . . ."

"And I'll continue to do so . . . here—" angrily— "cut it out!" as he tried to lift a piece of toast from the tray which Mary was taking away—"or you'll be as sick as a dog tonight—and I'll have to hold your head. Let's get to work. Where's that play you were raving about yesterday?"

They sat down side by side and commenced reading. Then, suddenly, she took her handkerchief and touched his face with it lightly.

"As usual! Too much powder! You look like a clown," she said brutally. But her superb eyes were illuminated by a marvellous, transcendental tenderness.

She bullied this man. She told him the plain, unvarnished truth to his face. She hated most of what he did, said and stood for, even most of what he thought. But he was the god of her worship. Clay feet he might have. She did not care. She loved him; defended him against all comers, defended his blackest sins.

If years ago—a debatable point—their friendship had been more than platonic, they had both

forgotten, had grown beyond the merely physical stage. Today, in a queer, spiritual way, they were a unit, would be a unit until the end . . . although Katharine Healy, who was a first-rater, who knew that she was, and who knew that he could not do without her, never permitted him to see that she was aware of it and gave him all the credit of their association.

"Let's get to work!" she repeated.

And they worked, at Foster's play, arguing, quarreling, dissecting; worked feverishly in spite of frequent interruptions: Griggs arriving periodically with letters and telegrams; Powers with actors' demands, never granted, for interviews; Herman Hesse, the head bookkeeper and general factotum, with checks to be signed . . . all cursed, satisfied, dismissed . . .

"Always butting in with their trifling poppycock! Why don't they use their own initiative?"

"Wouldn't you give them hell if they did!" replied Katharine Healy.

Cardoza looked up as there was another interruption, a double one, Ben Levi, the business manager, entering on the heels of Alfred Hadley, the publicity director.

The latter spoke first, nervously.

"Seen Lysander Cotton's article in the *Gazette* about you, Guv'nor?"

"About me—or against me?"

"Well—against you . . . and—" the other coughed—"praising the Playgoers . . ."

Cardoza's face darkened. So did Katharine Healy's.

The Playgoers' Guild was a theatrical organization, originally a group of young, earnest, idealistic amateurs who, despising the sex dirt and melodramatic hokum of Broadway, had started producing in a Greenwich Village barn. Within a few years they had risen to an enviable position; had left Greenwich Village to challenge Broadway on its native heath. They had succeeded. Some people called them cultural and intellectual snobs. If they were, then they themselves were not aware of it. For they were honest artists; and today, by most of the critics and by many of New York's intelligentsia, they were hailed as the saviors of the American drama and were frequently, to his disadvantage, compared with Leo Cardoza.

The latter hated them, cursed them—because, deep in his soul, he feared them—feared their youth, their honesty, their steady achieving.

He cursed them now, roundly; and when Hadley suggested that a tactful dinner invitation to a dramatic critic might do wonders, he cut in heatedly:

"To hell with the whole lot! Let them scribble what *they* please! I'll produce what *I* please!"

Hadley sighed. He admired his chief; admired his courage—courage blazing up suddenly, reckless, self-hurting. Still—it was his duty to point out . . .

"But, Guv'nor . . ."

"Get out of here!" roared Cardoza.

Then, when Hadley had left, he turned to the business manager:

"And what's biting *you,* Ben? Lost a nickel down the subway slot?"

"No. But I might save more than a nickel for *you.*"

"Money!" growled the other. "I knew it! That's all you think of, all you dream of, Ben!"

Levi smiled.

He had been with Cardoza as long as Jack Griggs and Katharine Healy; had worked his way up, thanks to his shrewdness and honesty, until, today, he was the most important man in the organization. He was devoted to his chief, yet appalled at the man's extravagance, and considered all people connected with the theatre, from star to stage hand, crooks . . . crooks from whom he must protect his employer with the help of contracts that were the comment and curse of Broadway.

He could have named his own price with half a

dozen rival producers. But none of them could offer him the emotional appeal, the genuine thrill of his association with the Guv'nor—the appeal, the thrill which his lean, parched soul craved and needed.

He took a letter from his pocket.

"What is it?" demanded the Cardoza.

"Motion picture offer for one of your old plays. I'd advise you to accept!"

"No!" shouted Cardoza, slamming the letter on the floor.

Stubbornly the other bent his back to pick up the sheet of paper upon which the round figures stood, fat and healthy, for all to read.

"It's a hell of a large pot of dough!" he commented mildly.

"I won't sell!"

"But . . ."

"No!"—savagely. "Not if I were starving!"

Cardoza hated the motion picture industry as he hated the Playgoers' Guild; hated it—since this was always a concomitant of hate with him—because he feared it. The only thing in his life which he feared—a very little—yet did not hate, was Katharine Healy. Too, she was the only human being to whom he was never unkind.

"We need the money," Levi hammered at him, "and we need it in a hurry. Our last failure . . ."

"Shut up!" raged Cardoza. "I won't sell to the movies! I won't! Not a single line I've written! I'm an artist—not a damned understudy to a damned photographer!"

Katharine Healy sighed. How he hurts himself—she thought—with his egotism! Oh—how selfish he is—and how plucky—how amazingly plucky!

She coughed; and Levi understood the signal.

He shrugged his shoulders. Give the Guv'nor enough rope, and he'd hang himself and his staff. Well—they'd cut the rope in time, he and Katharine Healy. They'd save him from his worst enemy: himself. That was *their* job . . .

He left the studio, and Cardoza stared after him, trembling with anger.

"Oh—" he cried— "all these piffling blah interruptions! And half the day gone . . . almost noon . . . and Foster'll soon be here . . ."

Then, with a sudden smile, sudden enthusiasm:

"He's gifted—that Foster! Splendid play, isn't it, Healy?"

"Yes," she agreed, flipping over the pages with an experienced hand. They were now alone save for Griggs who, as usual, was hovering in the background, doing nothing at that moment, and doing it very well indeed. "Woman lead," she went on. "Whom have you in mind, L. C.?"

When he was silent, she herself suggested several actresses, adding:

"Rita's too emotional for the part. Ruth Hoyt isn't good enough. What about Helen Sencken?"

"No."

"Why not?"

He looked at her; looked away. He fiddled with his handkerchief; dropped it; picked it up; dropped it again; ran a hand through his hair.

"Well . . . ?" Katharine Healy demanded, impatiently.

"I—" he said finally; and he blushed a little, seemed as guilty as a small boy found in the jam closet—"I've thought of somebody . . ."

"Who?"

"Nobody you know. New actress—young—charming . . ."

Katharine Healy's heart sank, aching, as it had sunk and ached so often in the past.

"New actress — young — charming . . ." she knew the words; knew the meaning, the impulse in back of the words, at times even before he knew it himself.

She stared at him, with piercing suspicion in her violet-blue eyes; asked grimly:

"And who's the Ninth Wonder of the World now? What's her name?"

"Sally Cameron."

"Blonde or brunette? Brunette—I'd guess. Your last one was a blonde."

"Don't be facetious, Healy. Miss Cameron is the very girl I need for the part. She played a small bit in Al Stone's last show. Jack and I saw it the night before it closed. She's coming to the studio today . . ."

"Oh—she is, is she?"

"Yes. Lovely little thing—so talented—so innocent . . ."

"Good Lord!" exclaimed Katharine Healy, with a sort of fighting resignation. "Another floozy!"

"Don't be so intolerant! You haven't even seen her!"

"I know the breed," she told him curtly. For she considered every woman who entered Cardoza's colorful, women-filled life a "floozy"; looked on each and every one with deep, generally justified distrust.

"Know 'em to be—well—what you say they are—even before you lay eyes on them?" he suggested with a fleeting smile.

"They wouldn't come here unless they were."

"That's hardly a compliment to me."

"Nor intended as such, L. C. You've enough sycophants around this dump—" leveling an ironic look at Griggs—"without me joining the chorus of soft-soapers."

"Let me tell you about Miss Cameron . . ."

"Don't want to listen. Get to work. Here—" pointing to a passage in the playscript— "this is a bad entrance—where 'Lester' comes in on 'Harriet' . . ."

They worked for a few minutes; and then, suddenly and dramatically—for everything in that office was keyed deliberately to a dramatic pitch —a bell rang.

Three short peals. A pause. Three long peals. Another pause. Then one short peal, like an exclamation mark.

It seemed like a signal; and it *was* a signal, according to a system by which the producer knew who of the few people whom he could not refuse to see, was on his or her way to the studio.

"Ruth Hoyt!" said Katharine Healy. "Come on, Jack!"

At once they hurried up the steps which led to a gallery surrounding the room on three sides and communicating with a luxurious bathroom, a strangely monastic bedroom, a kitchenette, and a tiny Japanese roof garden; and, as they went, Leo Cardoza straightened his broad shoulders under the purple robe, dusted his face with a dash of powder from an alabaster bowl in the desk drawer, and looked at himself in the ivory-backed mirror which lay beside the bowl.

He rose; half opened the door which, through a narrow hall, connected with the enormous, inner studio, a place of deep, trooping, coiling shadows and glaring high-lights, crammed with antiques of many jumbled periods, with all sorts of treasures gleaming from glass cases or hidden in closets or wall safes . . . a studio which would be a pawnbroker's idea of paradise, tawdriness shouldering beauty, and the aroma of the theatre's make-believe world over it all like some dusty, rather pathetic pall—smothering and oppressive, cloying and acrid . . .

He returned to his desk; had sat down again when Ruth Hoyt came in with her gliding, hip-swinging walk, excessively golden of hair, excessively blue of eyes, her curves frustrated at the expense of her healthy appetite, her outer woman definitely girlish as to organdy and lace.

"Hullo, Guv'nor!"

"How are you?" he greeted her perfunctorily, without rising to meet her, instead leaning back in his chair and regarding his latest and most unsatisfactory leading woman with a queer smile, half cruel and half indulgent.

Six weeks earlier her last vehicle, *Galahad Tompkins,* had closed, a complete failure. The critics had been unanimous in blaming her; had not blamed

the author, Pat Mulholland, a well-known and experienced playwright.

It had been a blow to Cardoza. He had intended training her so that she might rise like a new and dazzling planet on the envious, admiring Broadway firmament; had trained her indeed, personally, assiduously; and the planet had shown less gleam than a twenty-five watt electric light bulb . . . and this after his silent resolution to use her as a weapon against his greatest, most imperious woman star, Rita Andrews!

Rita Andrews who, doubtless, was laughing at him—over there—in Chicago . . .

So he thought. And his smile changed; grew less indulgent, more cruel. His kiss upon Ruth Hoyt's proffered cheek, as she swayed over to him, was as perfunctory as his greeting had been.

"Well . . . ?" he demanded; and listened with half an ear as she broke into a tirade—a tirade he had heard often during the past weeks—against her late play, the author, the stage manager, the company, the publicity campaign.

He replied in monosyllables; he stared at her, wondering, with the rather tragic amazement which comes to sensualists once the fire of passion has turned to ashes, what he had ever seen in her. Why—she was not even pretty, though she lighted up well back of the footlights! Her nose was de-

cidedly blunt. Her narrow face sloped wedge-shaped to a cleft, pointed chin. Sex appeal? Yes. She could make an archangel feel self-conscious. And then her voice. A delightful voice, with a natural Southern drawl. And her manner so childlike and appealing—deceptively appealing . . .

"Floozy!" Katharine Healy had stigmatized her on sight.

Healy was right—he thought with a sigh. Damn her—she was always right . . .

"And as to that third-rate ham," Ruth drawled, "Grant Lorimer, who played across from me . . . he missed every cue—he . . ."

"I know it all by heart!" Cardoza interrupted suddenly. "I've heard enough about that old play!"

"What about a new one?" She perched on the arm of his chair. "Nice, new play . . . got one for your little Ruthie, Guv'nor?"

"No!" he shot at her, straight as a bullet at the target.

"N-no . . . ?" she echoed incredulous.

"That's what I said!"

"You—can't mean it—just can't!" she coaxed, with the sound of restrained tears in her voice.

"I do mean it. Definitely. Once and for all. I've stalled you for weeks. Didn't want to hurt your feelings. But this can't go on forever. I have no play for you. Nor shall I look for one."

"But—" she stammered, brushing away her tears with a wisp of chiffon—"you can't be serious!"

"I'm perfectly serious!"

She put an arm around his neck.

"I know what's the trouble," she informed him with saccharine patience, though there was in her eyes—had he but noticed—a subtle cruelty which matched his own. "You're tired. Tired of me . . . you needn't deny it . . ." he did not; had no intention of so doing— "but also a little tired of the theatre . . . things haven't gone so well with you recently, have they, Guv'nor?"

"Who says things haven't gone well with me?" he demanded, with a barely controlled fury, leaning as far away from her as possible. "Who dares to say it?"

"Everybody on Broadway! You haven't had a success in a coon's age. Even Rita came a flop. But by'n'-by you'll find me a new play—and you'll get back all your losses and more . . ."

"Get up!" he told her harshly. "You make me nervous."

She rose; and he continued tersely:

"I'll never retrieve my fallen fortunes by you!"

"Even so—I want a play! You owe me something."

"I don't owe you a damned thing!"

"You do!"

"No! What were you when you came to me? A mediocre, unknown newspaper woman asking for an interview. Stage-struck . . ."

"Oh—" she cried, indignantly.

"Stage-struck!" he repeated. "You had a certain charm, a certain eagerness. I mistook it for talent, and, in the beginning, you obeyed me, let me fashion, shape you. Then, as soon as I launched you, you imagined you could direct yourself. You didn't, couldn't get it through your head that your only salvation as an actress lay in surrendering yourself to my hand, the master hand which pulls the strings. You wished to cut the strings—to posture that puppet yourself—that jerking, uninspired marionette . . . Ruth Hoyt—without Leo Cardoza! I let you do it, because it was the only way in which I could prove to you—prove to the critics —prove to all Broadway—that you cannot act!"

She stamped her small, fleshly foot in the short-vamped shoe.

"I can act!" she cried, childishly enraged. "I can!"

"No. You lack intelligence, fire, the vital flow of brain and body. I—ah—I have wasted my money on you, my time, my affection . . ."

"Wasted?" she echoed, in a muffled voice; and he nodded his fine, white head, and went on:

"As to the money? What do I care?" Bombas-

tically he spoke, yet with clear truth. "But the time —the precious time I've wasted—the precious affection . . . that is different! You—you have failed me! And that, I can never forgive!"

She stared at him. Her tears dried as if by magic. She said, her red lips drawn back from her pointed, blue-white teeth:

"You make me sick! You made me sick the first time you kissed me! God—how vain you are—and how old! Old!" she reiterated. "Old! *Old!*"

He jumped to his feet, lightly as a cat.

"Out of my office!" he shouted. "Out of my life! I'm done with you! Through!"

She walked toward the door. There she turned; said carelessly, laughingly:

"Not any more through with me than I'm with you, sweetie. We're quits, see?"

She was about to cross the threshold when he lifted a hand.

"Wait!" he ordered huskily.

She had committed the one unforgivable sin—unforgivable to all except Katharine Healy—she had called him "old."

Old—he—the Wizard of Broadway, who would outlive, would out-triumph them all? Old—he—Leo Cardoza, in whom the blood ran swift and hot and keen and young?

Unforgivable!

And yet . . . she was leaving him, no longer in tears, no longer with pleas, but with a light and sardonic gayety. Was it acting, he wondered? If it were acting, had he not been mistaken in her? Or was it merely the woman's desire to save her face?

He must find out. For there was his insatiable, psychological curiosity.

So, with grave tenderness, he said:

"Do not let us part in anger, Ruth. Love—ah—love comes, like a flash of lightning, and so departs. You are not to blame. Nor am I. We—yes—we loved each other. Together we have squandered many golden hours, hours like round, fresh-minted coins," he went on, warming to his words, to the picture they evoked, sincere in his utter insincerity, always the poet, always the actor playing a part, always finding the proper phrase, always believing in himself with that completeness which was both his strength and his tragedy. "Coins of love," he continued, "with which for a little space of time we were able to buy the world, to offer a price for heaven! Thus—do not leave me in anger, child. I said you couldn't act. I meant it. You are not equipped for the weariness and toil of the stage. Your life should be sheltered, protected. You—" relegating her to a suburban home, a flivver, and a colored maid-of-all-work—"you should make some man happy—live the quiet, domestic life—

bear children! Ah—" nor did he mean it ironically; for the man had no sense of irony; had, indeed, little sense of humor—"you were not destined for the footlights, but for the lamplight!"

His voice broke. He was a little overcome by his pretty pastel painting; so overcome that he neither understood nor questioned the significance of Ruth's silver-sharp laughter.

"You have wounded me," he told her, still with that same enameled tenderness. "You have lacerated my heart. And yet—come to me if you need anything—any time. Come to me as your friend, your best friend—for the sake of the enchanted hours of love that were once our very own!"

Almost he expected applause, clapping hands, cries of: "Author! Author!" And he was utterly amazed when, instead, he heard three sharp, succinct words:

"You old fool!"

"Eh . . . ?" His mouth gaped.

Swiftly she walked up to him and stood leaning on the bright parasol she carried, its ivory head cupped in her pink palm.

"You old fool!" she repeated slowly, venom dripping in every measured syllable. "You conceited old jackass! Say—I was only trying to make a sucker out of you when I came here pulling a Niobe, asking you for a play . . . would have kept my

mouth shut if you'd given me one—a good play, the right play. For—listen, Guv'nor—I was through with you weeks and weeks ago, long before you were through with me. Meant for the sheltered life, am I? Meant to be protected? Well—get this and get it good!—I *am* protected! And by a man a thousand times more important than you! A man who knows how to treat his women! A man, Guv'nor, who doesn't make his women work for him!"

She turned, laughed again, left, while Cardoza sat motionless.

He was hurt to the core . . . all his studied generosity, his sense of the fitting, dramatic tag line flung back into his teeth. His lips moved in gray, solemn, almost Biblical curses. And yet that amazing brain of his, that supreme, invincible sense of the theatre, was predominant.

"God!" he murmured. "If she could only have made a stage exit like that—in *Galahad Tompkins* . . . what a wow that play would have been!"

CHAPTER THREE

AGAINST the gallery railing Katharine Healy leaned, clenching her lean fists, her heart hot and choked.

She had overheard most of the conversation in the studio; had listened, feeling Cardoza's changes of mood almost before they came, at times scorning him in her soul, and perfectly agreeing with Ruth Hoyt when the girl had called him an old fool. Yet it had taken every ounce of Katharine Healy's control to restrain herself from rushing down the steps, flinging herself upon the younger woman, taking the white throat in her two muscular hands and wringing breath and life out of it.

She came downstairs now, trembling a little from the force of her paradoxical, yet wholly logical, rage. She walked up to Cardoza. She looked at him with her bitter, savage devotion, her terrible and pitying comprehension.

He smiled. It was an unreal smile, his mouth twisted as if he had tasted gall.

"That woman . . ." he began.

"Forget her, L. C.! She isn't worth wasting a single thought on, a single regret." She bent down to smooth the tumbled masses of white curls and touched her lips lightly to his forehead. "You're a bad boy," she told him. "But I love you."

"I know," he replied, absently patting her hand. "I know. And—well—I guess you're the only one who really loves me . . . the only one, Healy."

"Shouldn't wonder," came her dry comment.

He stared at her suspiciously; then he laughed; suddenly, unreasonably exclaimed:

"You talk too much!"

"Eh?"

"That's your way of shirking work. Back to the job—or I'll dock your pay."

It was not a forced, jesting mood meant to hide his hurt. It was how he felt. Work—his chosen work . . . it mattered; and nothing else mattered. It was his panacea against insults, against disappointments, against life.

Katharine Healy understood—and admired.

"All right," she said. "Let's go!"

But they were not destined to work for long. A moment later, Griggs came, announcing that Robert Foster, the playwright, was waiting in the inner studio.

"Let him wait," said the producer. "Good for

playwrights . . . makes 'em less cocksure. And—Jack . . ."

"Guv'nor?"

"Find out who's keeping Ruth Hoyt, will you?"

"I know—have known it for weeks."

"Then why the devil didn't you tell me? I might have made an ass of myself with her—just now—if I hadn't been careful!"

Katharine Healy hid a smile, while Griggs was silent. He knew that he would not have been thanked for gratuitous information. His job was to learn all he could and keep it to himself until his employer asked to hear it—as he did now, violently, impatiently:

"Who is it? Are you deaf? Who is it?"

"Julius Beck, Guv'nor."

Julius Beck—thought the latter—a man his own age; the self-appointed patron of the fine arts, and one of the richest bankers in the country.

"Caviar for a plumber!" he commented scornfully; simply because he liked the phrase.

For Ruth—he was aware of it—was not caviar, nor was Julius Beck a plumber. She was baker's bread and salt butter, smeared with sickeningly sweet jam; and the banker, whatever his emigrant beginnings, was today cultured and highly civilized.

"Caviar for a plumber," he repeated. He turned

to Katharine Healy: "Make a note of that line. I'll use it in a play some time." Then, to Griggs: "When is that little girl coming—that Sally—oh—"

"Sally Cameron."

"Why do you always interrupt me? I never forget a name or a face. Well—when she comes, I want you in, Jack, and Deane and Bruce. Tell the boys it's the old system."

The "old system" was an integral part of the Cardoza organization. It meant that when a new prospect, untried actor or actress, was being measured for a part, Griggs, Deane Powers, and Bruce Donaldson, the Scotch art director, hovered inconspicuously about the studio, observed the tyro, and indicated their approval or disapproval by the ancient Roman method of thumbs up or thumbs down . . . a pleasant legend, as the Guv'nor, ultimately, though his henchmen might turn their thumbs up or down until they grew that way, consulted no opinion in the world save his own.

Griggs left, and Katharine Healy gathered up some papers preparatory to her automatic disappearance. But, as she crossed the studio, the secretary came back, followed by Robert Foster.

She looked at him searchingly. She had wondered about him: an unknown author—yet his play had a touch both sure and delicate. Now she saw a

young man, short rather than tall, strongly, stockily built, moving his body with that unconscious ease which we have grown to think of as a Latin trait. He was, she felt immediately, intensely masculine, the round, hard head capped with thick, brown curls, the large nose strongly marked at the roots, the chin slightly prognathic, and the eyes, which met hers fleetingly, of the greenish brown of a moss-agate. He had alertness in the lift of his head, eagerness, and the splendid, arrogant bearing of youth.

"Looks like a nice boy," she thought sullenly, going up the gallery steps. "Wonder what'll happen to him in this damned office?"

And, even as she heard the producer's paternal, almost affectionate greeting, she fancied that she already knew what would happen. If he were weak, the gold of his spirit, offered on the Cardoza altar, would tarnish and cheapen. If, on the other hand, he were strong enough to resist corrosion and decay, if the talent which his play unfolded matured into genius . . . then, she thought anxiously, what would happen to Cardoza?

The latter was getting old. And might not his age mean defeat if he should lock horns with a younger personality, as strong as his own? And such a personality, Katharine Healy, with her sixth sense where the Guv'nor's interests were concerned,

apprehended in her first glimpse of Robert Foster and experienced it as a physical blow.

Hostilely now she stared back at the playwright who, following Griggs, had only seen that a woman had passed him, a curiously tall woman in a curiously old-fashioned gown . . .

He was exultant. He was on the crest.

When Griggs had telephoned him, making the appointment, he could have shouted with joy. He was on the threshold of a realized ambition. To see Cardoza, to talk with him, to persuade him that in the blue-bound script he had sent him was a big play, a play of America . . . a play of the West from which Foster had come! The real West —not the faked, romantic West! He was working now on a second drama, a drama of New York as he had found it during the years he had been in town—a drama of the white-collar people who ride in the subways and live under the L. He was learning to know them, their hopes and sorrows, joys and aspirations. But the play *Bedrock* which he had submitted to Cardoza contained in it a cross-section of life as he had lived it and seen it lived in Montana, before his removal East.

Cardoza drew him out to talk about himself. He listened sympathetically.

It was not the first time youth's ambitions, youth's ideas and ideals, golden, generous, inco-

herent, had been poured at his feet, in this very room.

After a while he spoke of the play:

"You've sold it—to me!"

"Oh—" exultingly— "do you mean it—really?"

"Yes. It's the sort of play that interests me—a man struggling to wrest a fortune from the mines, the hard, pitiless rocks, his eventual, crashing success, his bewilderment after the first novelty has passed . . . glorious stuff! Only—some of your stage mechanics creak a little . . . it needs a bit of rewriting, Foster."

"Of course," was the immediate, modest admission.

"And I'll help you."

"That's awfully white of you, Mr. Cardoza!"—and Foster looked gratefully at this man whose soft, beautiful hands held the key to success and fame; looked at him almost with adoration.

The other read the signs correctly—for he had read the same signs so often in the past—and went on advising changes in the play until Foster exclaimed:

"Do you know what I would like?"

"Well . . . ?"

"You'll think me cheeky."

"Tell me just the same, my boy."

"I'd like you—as my collaborator in the play."

The producer smiled inwardly. This was the goal at which, subtly, he had been driving, but had wanted the other, not himself, to suggest.

"If you really wish it, Foster . . . ?"

"Wish it! It would be a godsend—an inspiration!"

The younger man was flattered, deeply touched. To have the Wizard of Broadway as a collaborator . . . why—his imagination soared into the empyrean.

Of course, at his newspaper office, some of the old-timers had warned him; chiefly Lysander Cotton, the dramatic critic, that fat, catty, witty, indolent, affected man.

"Sent your play to the Guv'nor?" he had asked. "Well—God help you and the play if he accepts it!"

"He doesn't really know Cardoza," Foster thought now. "Envy—a good half of it!"

And he demanded, on fire to see his brain child on the boards:

"When will you produce it, sir?"

"We'll see. First the rewriting, and the casting. By the way—I've somebody in mind for the leading woman . . . the young girl . . . what do you call her . . . ?"

" 'Harriet.' "

"Charmingly drawn part. Only—she lacks one thing."

"What, Mr. Cardoza?"

"Appeal to the senses—the sweet paprika of sex . . ."

"But I hadn't thought of her that way. I visualized an appeal to the heart—not to . . ."

"Foster," interrupted the producer, "we must consider a little, just a little, what the public wants—the box office!" Then, as he saw the other's mouth straightening to a thin line, he added quickly: "We'll talk about that later. Don't want to persuade you against your will. Now—as to contract . . . ?"

"I trust you there—implicitly," came the generous rejoinder. "Whatever you say."

"Good boy! You won't lose by it!" He turned to Griggs. "Ask Ben to come up."

Griggs telephoned; and, waiting for the business manager, Cardoza talked of the play, showing such complete understanding of its finer points that Foster was carried away with enthusiasm. It seemed to him that, save in the single instance of the leading woman, the other had seen not only what he had put on paper, but even what he had tried, and failed, to write.

The Wizard of Broadway! Wizard indeed!

He liked him tremendously; liked him even more as Ben Levi entered and Cardoza said:

"Ben, this is Mr. Foster. I just bought a play of his . . . glorious play. I want a contract for him."

"What terms?" was the prosy question.

"What do I know about terms?" exclaimed Cardoza. "I'm an artist, not a miserable east-side huckster, ringing coins on a counter. Foster trusts me—and I trust you. We both trust you—don't we, Foster?"

"Absolutely!" laughed the latter who accepted a cigarette from Griggs, while Cardoza accompanied Levi to the door, whispering:

"Don't forget clause seven. Fifty per cent split on author's royalties. I'm the collaborator."

"You always are," smiled the business manager and departed.

A moment later, Deane Powers came in.

"Miss Cameron to see you, Guv'nor," he announced.

"In five minutes, Deane." And to Foster: "Next week we'll start rewriting *Bedrock*. Good-by, my boy, and God bless you!"

The playwright left, and Cardoza ran up the gallery steps, passing Katharine Healy who stopped him with a lean, strong hand.

"Shouldn't run. Bad for your heart."

"I'm in a hurry."

"So it seems. But why?"

"I—oh—" quickly—"I want a handkerchief."

"What's wrong with the one in your pocket?"

"I want a clean one . . ."

"And a drop of perfume on it and another drop on your lily-white brow! I know, you fraud! I heard Deane announce Miss Cameron. You know—at times you remind me of a chorus-girl trying to make her first big butter-and-egg man, L. C.!"

And she walked down the rest of the steps, while Cardoza, in his bedroom, effected the very things she had accused him of and while Robert Foster was talking to Sally Cameron in the inner studio.

Foster had entered the inner studio, high of heart, in a glow of happiness; had lingered for a moment, looking at some of the curios, unable to tear himself from the strange, fascinating atmosphere.

Then he had seen a girl, walking up and down, sitting, rising, again pacing . . . a small girl with a lovely, supple figure in smart clothes that seemed a little worn; a girl with a high-bridged nose, a scarlet, generous mouth, and hair that, eluding the concealment of her tight, knitted straw hat, shone flame-red.

"Nervous," he guessed. "I bet she's an actress. Pretty, golden little thing . . . like to know what color her eyes are . . . haven't I seen her somewhere . . . ?"

Covertly he watched her; went on in his thoughts, while he picked up a jade figurine:

"Wonder who she is . . . wonder what she's thinking of . . . she does look so all-fired nervous —and serious . . . the way she bites her lips . . ."

She was thinking, of course, just two things: to be interviewed by Leo Cardoza—how wonderful, how enormously important . . . and: "That's a good-looking boy over there. Doesn't seem like an actor . . . maybe he's a playwright . . ."

Just then he dropped the jade. It hit the table with a sound, thin yet as loud as panic . . . and "Oh!" exclaimed Sally Cameron, startled.

"It didn't break," he assured her. "I—I was thinking of something . . . sorry I frightened you . . ."

"Silly of me to jump," she told him, in her clear, young voice, and smiled. "I wasn't really frightened . . ."

He walked up to her.

"You're from the West, aren't you?" he asked eagerly.

She laughed.

"*Must* you be able to tell? Not that I'm ashamed of the burr in my voice. But I've taken such quite, quite expensive lessons in elocution to get rid of it."

"Don't!"

"Don't what?"

"Don't get rid of it!"

"Why not?"

"I like it. Makes me think of home."

"Where is home?"

"Montana."

"I'm from Oregon."

"Where it rains all the time!" he jested.

"Better than Montana—where it snows all the time!"

"Even score!" he admitted.

Both laughed; and she continued:

"You're not an actor, are you?"

"I'm a playwright. And—listen—for I'll burst if I don't tell somebody—the Guv'nor just bought my play—my first play."

"That's great! He sent for me, too," she told him. "He saw me the night our play closed. I was in *Happy Marriages*—Al Stone's show . . ."

"Of course," he exclaimed suddenly. "I didn't know you at once—with your hat on. You played the younger sister. You were skookum, absolutely skookum."

"Skookum! Haven't heard that word in a long time. You *are* a Westerner! And—thank you for the compliment, kind sir."

Her eyes—he saw now—were gray, the frank, fearless, steely gray of a well-tempered blade. There was an aura of enchantment about her—enchant-

ment potent and pulsing, though she was so young . . . so pathetically young, he thought.

They talked for a few moments, with the West's light, unselfconscious comradeship between sex and sex, the West's quickness in exchanging confidences.

"I wish you all the success in the world," he said, on leaving. "Wouldn't it be great if we got our lucky break on the same day?"

"Do you think Mr. Cardoza will . . . ?"

"Give you a chance? Sure. You'll make the grade. It's a cinch."

They shook hands. He left.

They had met, these two.

Youth had encountered youth. Loneliness had found loneliness. And ambition had measured ambition.

"Oh—" she thought— "I hope I'll be as lucky as he . . ."

"Miss Cameron," Deane Powers' voice cut into her revery, "the Guv'nor will see you now."

Cardoza was at his desk. Katharine Healy stood near the window, looking out on Broadway's shrill turmoil, while Powers, Griggs, and Bruce Donaldson, the angular Scotch art director who entered a moment later, busied themselves about the studio; seemingly occupied with manuscripts and scenic plans and costume designs, but in reality watching keenly, ready to hold thumbs up or down . . .

and thumbs up it was, from the first, enthusiastically, as Sally Cameron sat in the chair, facing the light, which the producer had indicated.

Slowly, paternally, Cardoza congratulated her upon her performance in the Al Stone play. She leaned forward, almost stammering in her excitement.

"You—oh—" she begged, wishing reassurance heaped upon reassurance— "you really think I have . . . ?"

"Great talent. I am quite sure of it. But talent is a delicate and fragile bud . . . a bud which needs a skilled gardener before it can flower into perfect, flawless beauty." He smiled at her, his bright, black eyes softening. "Will you let me be the gardener . . ? Will you put yourself unreservedly into my hands . . . allow me to train you . . . ?"

She answered, her eyes misty with dreams, with gratitude, with happiness:

"You know I will!"

"There is no art like the art of the stage," he told her. "It is vital. It lives. It is eternal. It is the oldest art, the purest, the greatest. It is in every age, in every land, in every language, in every civilization. The rewards of it are shining . . . they are glorious —so glorious!" His voice rose triumphantly. This was his creed, his only creed. This was his confession of faith, the code by which he lived: the the-

atre—nothing else mattered. He went on: "But the road to the top of the mountain is hard and long and bitter. It is strewn with sharp rocks, with jagged, cutting pieces of flint." He rose; pointed a finger at her. "Your feet will bleed, Sally Cameron. Your heart will be torn. Your soul will be pierced. But you must climb on . . . on! You must not shirk the suffering. You must welcome it. You must embrace it. You *must* suffer. It is imperative. You cannot be a great actress, a great artist, until you have agonized with every fiber in you, every sensitive nerve. You must feel, feel, experience . . . in your own heart and soul, your own mind and body. For you cannot portray life —and you are very young, child—until you have lived it, at the hardest and fullest . . . until you have learned its pitiless lessons!"

He stopped. Sally's eyes were shining, and her lips quivered as if she suffered, already, even as she rejoiced. She was—he told himself exultingly—more than beautiful, more than gifted; she was pliant, soft, lovely clay to his magician's hands.

"Child," he said suddenly, "I am sorry for you."

"Sorry—for me?" she echoed incredulously. "With all you offer me?"

"Yes. Sorry," he repeated.

She stared at him, and he at her. Both seemed

to have forgotten the other people's presence in the studio.

"Why?" she asked.

"Because you are too young—too innocent—too trusting. You will be badly hurt, Sally—" using her Christian name with the theatre's easy familiarity —"badly hurt. I pity you. But—I shall not let you off!"

Silence dropped like a pall, like a premonition.

Katharine Healy's fingers drew patterns on the window sill. Griggs, Powers, and Donaldson exchanged glances. They were a little embarrassed. They had heard all this before, many a time, knew it by heart.

And yet it was not acting on Cardoza's part, nor hypocrisy; or, if acting, if hypocrisy, it was so sustained and amazing that it persuaded and victimized even himself . . . assuredly persuaded and victimized Sally Cameron who, completely carried away, was at that moment ready to promise anything and everything . . . for the sake of art, the theatre, her career, her high and glittering ambition; the sake of being taught by the master, of receiving at his hands the tremendous inspiration which was the Guv'nor's authentic gift to those who came into intimate contact with him.

An inspiration she would one day discover—as

others had discovered before, would discover after her—to be used with wary care, like a drug . . .

He smiled.

"Is it a bargain?"

"Yes, Mr. Cardoza."

"Good!"

Then, all at once, he changed his tone, snapped into business-like directions, ordering her to walk up and down, to sit, to move, to stop, to bend, to pick up an imaginary letter, to turn, to run, to handle objects on the desk and the tables.

"Do not speak," he commanded. "I want to study your gestures. And—take off your hat."

She obeyed. He sighed.

Red hair!

It had an emotional, a superstitious, a reminiscent pull for him. Years ago, there had been a woman. Shirley Parker. A woman with red hair—a woman who had hurt him to the core—a woman whom he had not been able to tame . . .

Her hair had come to her knees. Sally's was bobbed, though a long bob, brushed back from the forehead, waving, springing vitally, like the sculptured hair of a Greek statue, drawn behind her small, close-set ears and pinned at the nape of her white neck.

"You cut your hair," he accused her, frowning. "That's too bad. I don't like it—" adding quickly:

"for the stage. I like to see heavy hair, flowing, graceful, a flood of brightness or darkness, scented, supple, silken."

"Mine grows fast," she assured him eagerly.

"All right. Now—walk—to the left . . . to the right . . . slowly . . . fast . . ."

She followed his directions; and Katharine Healy, who had turned from the window, watched keenly.

Another actress in L. C.'s life, another woman, another . . . "floozy!" she said beneath her breath.

But she said it with uncertainty.

For the first time in her long servitude, her long rebellion, she was not sure. Her mind worked with rapidity and precision as she observed the young girl moving about the studio, her hair flaming in the light to raw gold, darkening in the shadows to rich, ruddy copper. She seemed clean and fine in every line of her body, in every feature of her oval face. If she were as she looked—thought the older woman in a sharp flash of prophecy—she would, through her fighting decency, thus through her granite resistance, and, too, through the drive of her talent should she possess it, bring unhappiness to Leo Cardoza. For she would take her wares, her talent and her unsurrendered, untouched youth and loveliness, to other markets . . . and then she might win through, leaving the Guv'nor defeated.

"Defeated!" thought Katharine Healy, hearing

Sally speak the few lines from the playscript which, at this moment, the producer gave her to read. "Then, perhaps, he will turn to me. Not for passion . . . dear Lord!—I am old, burned out in service . . . but for comfort, the finest flowering of selfless friendship. And yet—I could not bear to see him defeated . . . I love him . . ."

No. She could not bear to see him defeated. Not only because she loved him; also because, in a way, he was her creation . . . there would never have been a Leo Cardoza without this tall, ungainly Irish woman . . .

Her creation! How could she permit it to be shattered, destroyed?

And her eyes darkened with hostility as the girl, on the producer's direction: "That will do!" laid the manuscript back on the desk and sat down.

Cardoza looked at his employees, with a faint shrug of his left shoulder. They knew the signal; left the studio, talking with muffled enthusiasm:

"Sure-fire!"

"Abso-tively!"

"She'll knock Broadway for a row of geraniums!"

"Lines like a race horse . . ."

"And what a voice!"

Only Katharine Healy did not say a word. She trembled a little, as if she were chilled.

The door closed; feet pattered away up the gallery steps; and Cardoza and Sally were alone.

Now, with the others gone, she was nervous; very nervous. She remembered suddenly stories she had heard—who has not?—of Cardoza, of other Broadway producers. Suppose he said to her . . . ? well . . . and what would she reply? Naïvely, rather pathetically, she had thought out her answers on the way to the theatre. Straight, brave answers.

And now she throbbed with relief and, womanlike, ached with a little illogical disappointment when Cardoza talked to her in a tone that was not even paternal, but crisply impersonal and businesslike.

He would engage her. Presently Ben Levi would talk over the financial clauses of the contract. But there were other clauses, not financial, yet very important.

"Yes . . . ?" she queried.

"You want to be a star some day, don't you?" And when she nodded her head eagerly, he went on that, away from the stage, the public must not be permitted to see its stars too closely . . . the glamor, the mystery must be kept intact. "Therefore, you must not be seen on Broadway—ever. Only on Fifth Avenue, possibly on Park, and very little of that. You must not visit night restaurants or clubs

or cabarets or roadhouses. Nor must you dine or lunch at the quite proper but too expensive, too smart places such as, for instance, the Ritz. The St. Regis is suitable—old-fashioned—conservative. Even there you may not go without a chaperon . . ."

"But—I have no relatives—no . . ."

"That will be my concern. I shall find the right person. Now—where do you live?"

She told him the address, in the far West Forties.

"What sort of a place is it?" he wanted to know.

"A theatrical boarding house."

"Impossible!"

"It's cheap, Mr. Cardoza."

"Cheapness is not a virtue. At least not always. I shall send my secretary to find you a nice little apartment."

"But—the money . . . ?"

"I shall advance it. I shall also advance the money for lessons you must take."

"Lessons?"

"Yes—it's my method with those I take under my wing—lessons in fencing, singing, riding, dancing, diction . . . all necessary for the complete development of your art. No, no—" as she leaned forward, her face glowing and her lips parted—"do not thank me. It is strictly business. And now—" he added gravely— "for the most im-

portant clause of your personal contract with me . . . you must not marry!"

She laughed outright.

"Marry . . . on the threshold of the career you offer me? Of course I shan't marry!"

"You are—perhaps—in love?" he probed, his eyes intent on hers.

"I am!" she cried. "Terribly in love!"

He sank back in his chair. His leonine head was lowered. Sharply, suspiciously, he stared at her. His fingers drummed on the desk.

He said slowly, heavily:

"In love . . . eh?"

What good to him was a girl, a silly little girl in love—with someone else? Why—now he came to think of it—she was not as pretty as he had fancied. Gauche she was; and far too naïve, too young. She was too . . . yes . . . too Western. A little too —well—earthy—for himself—and Broadway. No sophistication. Possibly no enduring talent . . . ?

"Terribly in love!" Sally cried again. "In love—with the theatre . . . *your* theatre, Mr. Cardoza!"

"Ah!" His face cleared. The sun shone once more, clear and golden. How lovely she was! What charm in her naïveté! How refreshingly Western! Why—Broadway, the public, would applaud her . . . she would be a credit to him . . . he would

make her a great actress, greater than Rita Andrews . . .

He rose; held out his hand.

"God bless you!" he said.

She left him standing there, the light on his white hair. She left the studio, left the theatre, walked along the dusty, tawdry, sour-scented streets . . . walked on air.

Broadway! How glorious! Life! How glorious—how enchanting!

And the Guv'nor . . . the dear, dear Guv'nor . . . what a man!

CHAPTER FOUR

SHE was happy.

Fleetingly she thought of the young playwright, fresh, too, from his personal triumph. Then, almost at once, she forgot him to think of her own triumph, the world-shattering event, the "lucky break."

The afternoon was steamy, oppressive, tropical. It dragged its frazzled, turgid end down the melting pavement. She did not care; hardly heard, as she turned into the West Forties far toward the river, the electric drills tapping and nibbling at a huge excavation, the hectic burst and bang of traffic exploding north and south along the Avenues; hardly noticed the reeking exhaust of hot-purring motors, nor the sticky, greasy odors oozing across the thresholds of restaurants and soda stores and luncheonettes; hardly saw, in an empty lot, the crop of battered sardine tins glittering among the summer weeds, nor the gaudy stretches of bright-daubed billboards, nor the people—tired, weary people—people toiling and trudging out of an in-

terminable yesterday into an interminable tomorrow—people cursing the heat that weighed on them like a sodden blanket . . . heat that she did not feel—today.

She reached the gloomy, brown-stone boarding-house with its narrow façade, the dingy Brussels lace curtains flopping at the rarely washed windows.

As she entered, the dark hall smote her with its mixture of odors: cooking, cheap perfumes, dust, cleaning fluids, green soap . . . other odors . . . odors of men and women closely herded together . . . odors of poverty.

She shrugged her shoulders. A few more days—and there would be the clean, comfortable little apartment which the Guv'nor had promised her.

Oh yes—life *was* marvellous. All you needed was faith in your star.

She went to her hall bedroom, passing a half-open door on the way up. She stopped there and looked in.

"Mr. Smith!" she called.

A man, reading at the window, rose. An old man, gray-haired, tall, slender; an Englishman who had once been a Shakespearian actor and a good one, and who was now playing one-acters in vaudeville—on the petroleum circuit for the most part; a man who had been, who still was, despite the mute,

tragic testimony of empty and half-filled bottles in his shabby cupboard—a gentleman.

"Well, Sally?"

She came in.

"I made it."

"Really?"

"Mr. Cardoza has engaged me."

"I'm awfully glad," he told her sincerely.

"You helped," she said, sitting on the arm of a golden-oak rocker.

"Did I?" He smiled at her, well pleased.

He had known Sally since her first appearance in the boarding house; had liked her; had come, even, to love her as a man who is old and innately decent loves decent and beautiful youth. And, from the fund of his long stage experience, he had coached her, taught her many a short-cut, many a clever trick of entrance and exit. There was something in the way she held her head and moved her hands that reminded him of another woman—an old woman now—the woman he had loved and married and who, light as a feather and drunk with folly, rebelling against his strict code of life, had run away from Bradbury Smith many years earlier. So many years earlier. And, ever since, it had been his fear, his obsession, that some day he would see her walking the streets.

He was haunted by the thought—a thought, he

told himself, trying to ridicule himself, tritely melodramatic . . . perhaps because he was an actor, looking for a smash of a third act curtain even in real life, his own life?

But, melodramatic or not, the thought persisted. Late at night, when the theatres had closed, he would prowl along the side streets of Broadway and peer sharply, with hope and horror in his heart, at the raddled faces of the women of the night, the women of the dark places . . .

"I'm awfully glad, Sally," he repeated. "Success —in our profession—it comes so rarely . . ."

"It hasn't come to me yet. Only the promise of it."

"It will surely come, my dear, with Leo Cardoza to help. And—" with a trace of embarrassment— "speaking of him . . ."

"I know what you mean," she laughed, "and you're wrong. He's a dear—and I," with a mock curtsy, "am a good little girl and shall remain a good little girl."

"Of course you will." He kissed her hand. He said it with sentimentality; a decent sentimentality; not sentimentality caused by too much alcohol.

"See you at dinner. I must tell Mother O'Neill."

She found the latter, so called disrespectfully but affectionately by several decades of boarders, in the long, narrow downstairs parlor, a room cluttered

with black walnut furniture and horsehair sofas and wax flowers under glass and steel engravings of impossible children playing with incredible dogs and daguerreotypes of gentlemen in Civil War uniforms and Civil War whiskers. Kitty O'Neill was a big-hearted, vast-bosomed, bullying old woman whose black satin bodice, sequined in green and blue, was a relic of the days when she had been the "ground woman," the strong woman, in an acrobatic act. Nor did the bodice exactly meet the sleazy skirt, and she brazened it out with a belt of curious silver links, a really lovely thing. She wore a coal-black wig; she was painted like a barn; and onyx earrings pulled down her yellowing lobes.

"Mother O'Neill!"

She looked up from her dusting.

"Oh—it's you, Sally? Why the excitement? Couldn't get a job and want to chalk up your board?"

"On the contrary. Got a job—a good one. Mr. Cardoza has signed me up."

At once the older woman folded her in a powerful, musty, perfumed embrace.

"Heaven bless the child!" she exclaimed. "Isn't that just too grand for words!"

"Isn't it?"

"I guess you'll be wanting the parlor floor now."

"No. You see—" Sally was a little troubled—"I'll have to leave you . . ."

"Sure! They all leave me the moment success gives them the eye. That's the way with folks. Mother O'Neill can take care of them. Mother O'Neill can cook for them and slave for them and clean for them and let their board bills run when they're broke and damn near ruin herself . . . and as soon as they strike pay dirt they beat it!"

"But I—" almost truthfully— "I don't want to leave you. Only Mr. Cardoza insists . . ."

"Run along with you!" Kitty gave her a little shove. "I was only joshing. I'm happy for you. You're not the first one that made the grade from this very house. Come back and see us. Only," she added resignedly, "you won't come back—if you make good! They never do!"

"I'll do both: make good—and come back," Sally promised, and went to her room to get ready for dinner.

Early dinner, since the boarders were of the stage.

One by one they straggled into the dining-room. Mostly vaudevillians. People who read *Variety* as they would the Bible. People whose *One More River To Jordan* was the jump—hope of the jump, seldom fulfilled—from Yonkers to Broadway, from the four-a-day to the two-a-day. People whose life began in the evening to the whining tune of:

"I'm just wild about Har-ree-ee,
And Harry's just wild about me-ee-ee . . .",

and wound up with a midnight cup of coffee-half-milk and a plate of sinkers at the nearest Childs'.

Some were "resting." Some were frankly out of a job. Some were between engagements.

There was the man with the trained seals; a worried man since his pet animal, Tobias J. Pilkington by name, was sick of some sealish disease and holding up the act. The seals did not eat at Mother O'Neill's, but his daughter did: a lovely, slim thing, billed as "Gloria the Mermaid," who swam as birds fly and did her diving stunts in the glass tank among the sleek beasts. There was a hard-boiled, married team; hoofers. He was a thin Cohanesque man, she, a short carbon copy of Lillian Russell. Both of them were much concerned for the welfare of their leggy kid in a Montreal convent and trying to get a Canadian engagement. There was a Bowery-born Chinese woman and her girl partner, a half-breed, who did Cantonese songs in the sort of Oriental costume which is never seen East of Suez, and then, switching to short skirts and bare legs for the Eurasian and man's evening clothes for the Chinese, proceeded with jazz and Charleston. There was "Roarin' Denny O'Malley," the Irish slap-stick comedian who had seen the light of

day, somewhere near Brooklyn Bridge, as Samuel Cohen, and a red-nosed Hebrew comic, born Jerry Mahoney . . . they were fierce rivals and excellent friends and coached one another.

Others came in, acrobats, trick bicyclists, a snake charmer who kept her pets in her room to the anguish of the colored maid . . . and Sally knew them all, liked them all.

She knew that, for all their bragging talk at table, they were worried people, poor people, honest enough people, badgering the vaudeville agents for jobs—anything, everything—even a split week out in the sticks.

It was Bradbury Smith who rose, with a glass of iced tea in one hand and lifting the other for attention, announced Sally Cameron's good fortune:

"Signed with Cardoza!" Then, in imitation of a certain Broadway cult: "Give the little girl a big hand!"

They gave it. They were envious. But they gave it.

They thought, one and all:

"Maybe *I'll* get the breaks—next week!"

Braggart, pathetic children, hard-working, dolorous and gay, generous, spendthrift, hoping, gilding their fading illusions . . .

So, in a buzz of excitement, dinner ended, Sally

went to her room to look over her meagre wardrobe and to dream a little.

She was conscious, at that moment, of loneliness, of a certain disappointment . . . because she had nobody to write home to. That was half the charm, half the thrill, someone waiting to get that letter or that wire, "I made it!"—someone who would say: "I knew all the time. Of course she'd make it . . ."

She sat there, silent, thinking, listening to slamming doors and zumming voices as the other boarders drifted out of the house and about their business; their business of loving, working, quarreling, job-hunting.

Only Bradbury Smith remained. Reading a paper, he waited in the parlor. He expected a caller—and, presently, the caller came, Robert Foster.

Foster had known the Englishman in the Middle West where he had worked on a small town newspaper, while Smith had played in stock. They had liked each other and had renewed their acquaintance in New York. Foster had recently finished a one-act sketch—he had it with him now—which Smith would try out in Newark.

Buoyantly he entered.

He had been down-town where—was he not a playwright, an accepted playwright?—he had said

good-by to his newspaper, to the boys there battering away at rusty typewriters, the copy-tube whistling its head off three times a minute, the make-up man hopping up and down in his sweat-soaked undershirt, the city editor swearing like a parrot.

"Here's your sketch, Smith, and . . . what do you think has happened?"

"Somebody gave you a pint of pre-war Bourbon?"

"Better than that! I sold *Bedrock*—to Cardoza!"

"Congratulations! When'll he put it on?"

"First a bit of rewriting," Foster replied; added with youthful importance: "Then we'll cast the play."

The other smiled. He knew what that "we" meant with the Guv'nor pulling the strings.

"Any idea who's going to be in the cast?"

"No—though the Guv'nor mentioned having somebody in mind for the leading woman . . . its the most difficult part in the play—"

"Character part?"

"No. Young girl."

"There are lots of ingénues kicking around Broadway."

"No synthetic seventeen need apply, Smith. This part needs the real thing. She must be young and fresh and eager. She must be splendid and vital

. . . oh—a girl with glamor—the glamor of innocence . . . small in body, big in soul—"

The Englishman raised his eyes, fine eyes, whiskey-dulled. He was sober tonight and very tired. But his face lighted up.

"My word," he said, "you might be describing a girl who lives in this house—who signed with Cardoza today."

"What a coincidence! I'd like to meet her."

"I'll see if she's home."

He left; returned, a minute or two later, with Sally Cameron. She looked at Robert Foster, and he at her. Then they laughed, and their hands touched and clasped.

"Oh—" asked the old actor, a little disappointed — "you know each other?"

"Yes—"

"No—"

"Well—we met—"

"Today—"

"In the Cardoza theatre—"

"But we don't know each other's name—"

"Won't you introduce us, Smith?" asked Foster, smiling.

He did, and they sat down, the three of them, and Bradbury Smith listened while, almost ignoring him, the two younger people talked, talked, talked.

Comparing notes. Exchanging confidences. But mostly about the Guv'nor:

"Isn't he wonderful?"

"Isn't he a corker?"

"Isn't he a wizard?"

"Notice his hands?"

"And his voice . . . ?"

They were so enthusiastic, so selfish in their triumph; and finally Smith, smiling a little, went upstairs, alone, the script of the one-act sketch under his arm.

There was always the hope of a good sketch, a long run, a decent living wage. Failing that hope, there was always the glass, the bottle, his memories and dreams.

"Miss Cameron," said Foster, "I've an idea."

"Yes . . . ?"

"Let's celebrate. I know a peach of a Wop speakeasy."

"Can't be done."

"Why?"

"I've promised the Guv'nor. Only the St. Regis—and never without a chaperon."

"But—"

"It's in the contract."

"Have you signed it yet?"

"No."

"There you are! You're still captain of your soul —and your thirst and appetite . . ."

So, presently, they went out.

But the speak-easy was stuffy and crowded and reeked of New Jersey bacardi and Bleeker Street champagne; and they left and turned toward Fifth Avenue where Foster hailed one of the last three remaining, derelict hansom cabs.

It was a summer night, a purple night, with Orion slanting, immense and lonely, across the sky, and the silver horn of the young moon shredding the fleecy clouds to gossamer.

Again they talked, eagerly.

"My parents are dead," she said. "Aunt Julie brought me up—she was housekeeper for a man who owned an apple ranch—out in Eastern Oregon. I've eaten so many apples I'll never have to see a doctor. Then my aunt died. I came to New York with a few hundred dollars—just two years ago . . . I'd done dramatics in high-school . . . and that's all. And you—how did you . . . ?"

"Dad's a doctor in a little Montana mining town. He's one of the best . . . but—God—what a life! At everybody's beck and call—day and night. I couldn't see it—not for me."

"And your father . . . ?"

"He was tickled to death. Gave me four years in

college. Then newspaper work—West, Middle West, East. I've wired Dad the good news."

"I've nobody to wire to . . . nobody with whom to share my happiness . . ."

"Oh yes, you have . . . a good friend."

"You mean Mr. Smith?"

"No—" violently— "I do *not* mean Mr. Smith! I mean Mr. Robert Foster."

She laughed.

"Really my friend?" she asked.

"Really!"

Round and round the Park they went, the driver nodding on his perch, the horse stumbling, its old head drooping.

"Wasn't it queer the way we met, Miss Cameron?"

"Yes."

He looked at her. Her face was sharply outlined in the moonlight. How young she was and—merciful Lord!—how lovely. His heart beat fast.

"Don't be a damned fool!" he told himself.

A pretty little actress—a soft, purple night—youth . . . that was all. Nothing amazing about it . . . and it didn't matter. He didn't want it. Work! That's what he wanted. Splendid, creative work. Plays. American plays. Plays that would make people cry and laugh and dream and wonder and long. Hard work! Work that meant con-

centration, physical and spiritual loneliness. No women. No alien personality cutting her way into his mind, clinging to his mind like a leech. And he thought, rather cynically: "There'll be plenty of women, plenty of little actresses, later on, when I've made the grade!"

Almost at once he dismissed the thought. It made him a little ashamed.

Again he looked at Sally . . . such a lovely face . . . and so sensitive . . . he liked her . . . why . . .

"Don't be a damned fool!" he told himself again.

But he did not look away from her. She turned to him. Their eyes met.

"What are you thinking about?" came her soft voice.

"Oh—nothing in particular."

The hansom had reached the eastern end of Central Park. Stone benches faced Fifth Avenue.

"Let's get out," he suggested.

They stepped from the cab and sat down on one of the benches. They turned toward each other.

Their hands touched; and then—while his brain whispered once more: "Don't be a damned fool!" and while his heart replied: "I can't help myself!" —his fingers closed on hers.

"Please—" she said, but without trying to withdraw her hand. "Please . . ."

"Sally . . ."

"You—you mustn't . . ."

"I—" he spoke before he thought; yet meant what he spoke; felt it— "yes, I must! . . . I'm mad about you . . . mad . . . I love you, Sally . . ."

She was honest with herself. She thrilled to his words, his nearness, his vitality, his male strength . . . how strong his hand, crushing hers . . .

"You—" she said, as many a girl has said to many a man— "you don't even know me . . ."

"I know you enough to love you!" he replied, as many a man has replied to many a girl. "It is as if I had known you for years. It *has* been years. I have always known you, always loved you. Sally—listen —take the risk . . . marry me—tomorrow . . . and, together, we'll light such a beacon as will put all Broadway on fire! Marry me," he begged. "I love you . . . I'll be good to you all my life . . ."

She was silent. He waited, aching to put his arms around her, to kiss her red mouth.

"I can't," she said suddenly, in a small voice. Then, quickly, her tone steadied. "I—I am ambitious. I've just got my first chance—with the Guv'nor. It means—my career."

His grip tightened on her bruised, small hand.

"But—don't you . . . ?"

"Like you?" she interrupted rapidly. "Tremendously. More than anyone I've ever met."

"I don't mean *like*. Love! Sally, we're young—the world is before us—we've the same ambitions and ideals . . . the stage. Couldn't you love me Sally?"

"I—I don't know," she said.

Then she rose to her feet and faced him, crying out:

"And I don't *want* to know! My career comes first—my future—my ambition! I must be free—free—free!"

And, in this moment, despite her brave words about being free, her bondage to Cardoza was born; and in this same moment Robert Foster met, but only dimly recognized, his enemy—the same Cardoza—the Guv'nor.

Only dimly. For in Cardoza's hand Foster's own future lay. He bent his head; rose, too; whistled to a night-cruising taxi.

"You're right," he said, crushing down the impulse to take her in his arms and kiss her until she ceased to be right. "You're quite right . . . and very sensible." There was a certain bitterness in his accents. "We must *both* be free . . ."

CHAPTER FIVE

FOR two weeks, night after night, lights burned until the early morning hours in the studio on top of the Cardoza theatre. From the broad window, gay with crimson and purple and emerald-green, which had once reflected the gleam of tall Spanish tapers, the radiant miracle of electricity streamed out to cast an attenuated but significant reflection upon Broadway's asphalt river.

The cop on the beat, yawning, swinging his stick, approached the night watchman of the theatre, borrowed a match, lit a surreptitious cigarette.

"Guv'nor at it again?" he asked, pointing upward.

"Sure. New play," the other replied with that glow of pride, of contribution to an event, which, as with most of Cardoza's employees, made up, in a way, for his lean wages.

"Well—more power to his elbow!" said the cop and moved on, a sharp eye on dark corners, an alert ear cocked for sounds, for wars and rumors of

wars; while upstairs Robert Foster, his first flush of success paled to the pursuit of perfection, the quivering of his heartstrings stilled to a steadier pulse, was experiencing his initial taste of the ringmaster's whip.

For Cardoza worked him, pitilessly; making him write and rewrite the play scene for scene and line for line. Now, the benevolence in abeyance, the paternal flattery conspicuous by its absence, he appeared to the playwright's tired, lack-lustre eyes as a sort of modern Simon Legree, a Mussolini of the billboards and the four-sheets.

Work without cessation, it seemed to Foster, with hardly a breathing spell, until his neat manuscript was in ruins and almost no word left of the original; and he would go home around four or half-past in the morning, dragging his aching legs, his brain feeling bruised and empty, and, flinging himself upon his bed, would sleep until late afternoon when he would rise, bathe, change, eat, and return to the battle.

This natural recuperation was not Cardoza's way, he knew. The latter would retire to his monastic bedroom—where, upon the whitewashed wall above the narrow cot, a scourge gave mute testimony to certain sadistic twists, certain curious, psychological fantasies—and lie down, completely relaxed. Five hours later he would be up, at his desk,

in supreme and active command of his organization . . . and toward evening, bright of eye, would greet his collaborator with a slight smile for the younger man's obvious weariness.

Then the grind would start again; the click of the typewriter; the pauses for discussion and argument.

One night, shortly before twelve, Foster lifted his cramped fingers from the keys and stretched his arms.

"Sorry, Guv'nor," he exclaimed, defeated. "But I've *got* to go to bed. I'm dog-tired."

"Are you?" Cardoza smiled, pityingly. "Run along, my boy. I'll work on alone . . . on another play."

"Oh—" Foster echoed, childishly disappointed—"another?"

"Why not?" The producer opened a desk drawer, drew out a tan-bound script and ruffled the pages. Again he smiled; a feline smile, with a hint of claws in it somewhere. "You don't imagine you're the only playwright on Broadway?"

"Of course not," came the irritated admission; and Cardoza went on:

"Get a good rest. After all, age has its compensations. We old soldiers—we always have a second wind upon which to draw . . . depths of the spirit—of past experiences—past triumphs—"

So he boasted, vanity in his eyes and a little sneer in the negligent gesture he made, a little mockery; and Foster remarked between his teeth:

"If you can keep on, I can!"

He fell to tapping the keys with deliberate, renewed vigor, while Cardoza laid the other play script aside—the script of an old comedy produced many years ago—and turned again to Foster's drama, well satisfied with his ruse.

Occasionally, during the last fortnight, the younger man had asked:

"Have you engaged your leading woman?"

"No—" Cardoza would answer— "not yet."

Each time it was on Foster's tongue to mention, as if offhandedly:

"I know the very girl. She signed with you lately."

But he remained silent. By now he knew the Guv'nor well enough to realize that gratuitous suggestions were not welcome.

And Sally? He did not believe that he and Sally would be able to work together—casually. He had taken her home, that night of their encounter, and they had parted on the understanding that they should be friends—no more. Each must go his way. Perhaps—some day . . . ? But that was all in the future. Each had a career; neither must be hampered by the other's success or failure; they must

possess themselves in coolness and serenity, unfretted by the changing temperatures of love. This play—*Bedrock*—was his chance. Sally would have to look after her own.

He had not seen her since that purple night in Central Park. But he thought of her so often; thought of the thrill of exploring a fresh, new, companionable mind . . . the mind's demands and the body's—youth's martyrdom—drawing strange and lovely arabesques on a background of enchantment. Perhaps—he asked himself—it was nothing but this last, nothing but enchantment after all—because both had been so lonely that night—and so happy . . . ?

No, no! he decided.

For, deep in his heart, he knew that his quickly aroused love, love forced into premature blooming by circumstance and coincidence, by fate in other words, would and must endure. Only, these past two weeks, he had worked so hard, had been driven to such lengths of endeavor, that he had seemed to himself empty of every emotion save a desire for rest.

And Sally . . . what did Sally think?

He wondered. He did not see her, nor write. That was part of their bargain. They must be "free" . . . free even from the little distractions of pen and ink.

Now, the night when he had found himself conquered by Cardoza's mockery, an overwhelming need to see her came upon him; a need to be comforted, comprehended, encouraged.

"Tomorrow—" he thought— "I'll see her tomorrow . . . and to the devil with all our cool resolutions!"

He would see her, he promised himself, in order to satisfy his waking senses that she existed, in order to convince himself that she was the inevitable, the ultimate woman. Or else to find, after two weeks had passed, that she was no more than an ordinary girl, sweet and pretty and ambitious . . . and that the passion and longing of that amazing night had been a theatrical mirage, englamored by a perfect, sentimental stage setting, created by excitement and loneliness.

On the following day he went to her boarding-house. There Mother O'Neill met him with casual information:

"Sally Cameron? She's moved."

"Know where she lives now?"

"Sure." She gave him the address, in the East Sixties; and, in an ugly mood since, an hour earlier, her cook had left her, added: "The Guv'nor keeps his birds in gilded cages."

He dismissed the implication as rancor caused by the loss of Sally as a boarder. But, somehow, the

impulse to call on her had passed. He set off for the theatre. Whether she was, or was not, the end of his heart's quest would prove itself later.

"She was right straight along," he decided. "We must both be free—until she is a success—and I . . ."

But he did not cease to think of her, or to wonder:

"Does she think of *me?* Or has it passed with her—that flash of emotion? Is she, perhaps, a little ashamed of it? Or—does she laugh . . . ?"

She did think of him.

But she was as busy in her way as he in his. She had commenced the different, arduous lessons prescribed by the Guv'nor. She danced in a great master's studio; she sang in the studio of an equally great master; she bent her lithe, lovely body in the graceful postures of the fencer; she read lines and verses to a quiet, listening Englishwoman who had been engaged to watch over her diction, to sandpaper the Western burr from her voice . . . unnecessary, thought Sally, as in the part Cardoza had chosen for her she was to be Western, and the burr was to be accentuated.

She mentioned this to him.

"Quite so," he admitted, smiling. "But—you are *acting* the part."

"So much the better, then, if my accent is natural."

"Nature has very little place on the stage—only an imitation of nature. You are acting a girl of the West. Your acting must extend even to your accent. If it is too genuine, people will not believe you."

For he had given Sally the part of the daughter, "Harriet," in Foster's *Bedrock,* binding her over to secrecy. He lived, always, in a fear, almost an obsession, that all Broadway spied on him, eager and malicious, stretching out predatory hands with which to steal his ideas, his stars, his tricks.

"Tell no one," he admonished her. "Astonishment—surprise—that is the keynote of theatrical success. When I am ready to make my plans public I shall do so . . . but not before they are rounded, perfected. A rumor spread too soon—a whisper in the Green Rooms, on the street corners . . . and we shall have a dozen Western dramas launched at the same time as *Bedrock.* They are always waiting, the vultures, to steal the old man's thunder."

If his metaphors were mixed, his meaning was clear enough, and Sally went about her tiring, yet exhilarating, fascinating business of obeying his every instruction, hugging her secret to her heart. In the natural course of events she would meet Robert Foster; not, this time, beneath a vaulted,

purple, star-pricked sky, but in the sober atmosphere of the theatre. Then—and here her thoughts ran parallel with the playwright's—she would prove to herself how much that glamorous moment in Central Park had meant, how much of enduring reality it had.

Meantime she was working; and living simply under her chaperon's eagle eye.

The latter, an elderly spinster of excellent family, had formerly been a secretary in the Cardoza office. He had engaged her not only as Sally's companion, but also as her social mentor. For, as he had told the woman privately:

"The girl's innately a lady, eh, Emily? But we must sharpen the effect, emphasize it—against the time when she will be taken up by the right people. Not that it matters. Only—it's good publicity," he had added, carelessly.

Yet it did matter to him personally to be received on a footing of equality by the socially elect or self-elect. It mattered, as it must always matter to a man who, risen from nothing thanks to his own genius, professed to scorn organized society, to hold himself, as a creative artist, above it; yet who, in his darkly secret, illogical, pathetic heart, desired recognition by a furiously clannish and exclusive class, a class that amused itself with the world of the theatre while smiling at it in good-

natured contempt—a memory of the days when great lords paid their jesters to make them laugh—and were willing to take actors and actresses as lovers and mistresses, though keeping the bed's naked, physical intimacy strictly apart from social intimacy. This social intimacy the Guv'nor had in a measure won for himself; and he desired to win it for his stars—since they were his creations, integrally a part of him.

So Emily was well paid, as were the different teachers; and all these mounting bills were footed by Leo Cardoza out of a rapidly diminishing bank account, to the horror of his nervous, observant henchmen.

Nothing was said, however, until the day when he called his people to conference and announced his decision to put *Bedrock* into immediate rehearsal. He would cast at once. They would rehearse three weeks. Then two weeks' try-out on the road. Finally the grand opening, an early season opening at the Cardoza theatre.

Having announced this, sharp and barking as a general issuing orders for an attack, he sat back, rubbed his hands together, and waited for comments.

He expected some dissension. The play demanded a large cast. In the second act Foster had re-created a stupendous, heart-shaking mining disaster. Al-

together the production would be enormously expensive, with several scenic and mechanical difficulties that would tax even a large bank roll.

Therefore, when Cardoza ceased talking, his people looked at one another in consternation, despair.

Ben Levi's shoulders began to work in frantic, racial appeal against this bankrupting verdict. Katharine Healy's shoulders moved too, in ironic boredom. She had sat in on such a struggle so often; had never bothered to interfere. She knew, better than the others, that the Guv'nor would get his way. The others would not learn from experience. Each time they advanced to the centre of the ring, trying to do battle with their chief's disastrous extravagance.

Yet they were afraid, each hoping his neighbor would start the ball rolling. Silent they were; and Cardoza exclaimed impatiently:

"Well . . . ? Heard what I said?"

It was Levi who, as always, came out with the truth:

"We haven't the money, Guv'nor."

"*We?* What do you mean—*we?*"

"Well—*you,* then." The business manager bowed with an apologetic curve that seemed quite improbable in so corpulent a gentleman. "Rita Andrews' show cost you a mint. So did Ruth Hoyt's . . ."

"Shut up!" cried Cardoza.

He was livid with rage. What were dollars, thousands of them, to a man who thought in terms of art? No price was too steep for this intangible commodity . . . intangible until he had materialized it on a stage with the help of charm, youth, beauty, sonorous phrases, scenery, lighting effects.

He stamped up and down; finally stopped in front of Levi.

"If I haven't the money it's up to you to get it."

"But . . ."

"Don't 'but' me! Go out! Get the money! How? That's what I hire you for!"

"If you'd hold the play over for the spring season," the other ventured, "everything would be jake." He hesitated, then went on resolutely: "We've an offer to sublet the theatre. The Schonberg people came to me today. They're putting on a musical comedy. Good show. Cinch for a long winter run. Sure, quick money, Guv'nor. Your split would run to at least eight grand a week. I'd advise . . ."

"Ah!" Now Cardoza was crimson. "You—you dare to approach me with such an offer? *My* theatre—to house somebody else's attraction—so that all Broadway can laugh at me? My theatre to sponsor a rotten, low musical comedy . . . with cheap hoofers and red-nosed comedians and naked chorus

girls? Are you mad, Ben?" He raised his fists threateningly. "Traitor!" he shrilled. "Judas! Get out of my sight!"

Levi stood his ground. He appealed to the others:

"Donaldson—you agree with me, don't you? And you, Powers? Griggs! Hesse! We can't afford to put Foster's play on—can't afford to say no to the Schonberg offer . . ."

They were afraid of the Guv'nor. But they nodded or muttered assent. All but Katharine Healy. She stood there, tall, silent, sardonic. Let them argue. The Guv'nor would win out. Meantime she watched him closely. These rages, half simulated, worked up until they became real, were bad for his heart . . . his heart that pulsed violently as he blasted his employees with withering invective:

"Four-flushers! Penny-squeezing cheap-skates! Cowards scared of your own slinking shadows! Wretched hucksters in theatrical piece-goods! You —you crucify me on the cross of your petty anxieties, your lack of vision, your incredible stupidity! And for this—" he laughed— "I pay you wages! I carry you on my shoulders, a dead weight! I hamper myself! Why—you—" he turned to Levi and ended abruptly, absurdly— "you haven't the fighting spirit of a louse!"

Levi suppressed a grin. Magnificent, the old man,

magnificent! Nor did he mind the name calling. He was used to it. He looked at Deane Powers who smothered a yawn, thinking: If all the actors who beg me for parts had half the Guv'nor's talent for make-believe . . . ! He did not reply. Nor did the others.

"Can't you say anything?" demanded the producer, feeling that his scene had fallen a little flat. It was like boxing with shadows.

"Only," repeated Levi, "that you haven't the money, Guv'nor. And it's your own fault." He spoke reproachfully, though with a note of excusing tenderness. "You're so extravagant . . ."

"Why the hell shouldn't I be extravagant?" Cardoza wanted to know. "I spend money as it should be spent—superbly—for the sake of art. Money, as money, means nothing to me."

Then, suddenly, he roared:

"Get it, I tell you, get it!"

"How?" came the practical query; and Cardoza smiled softly, scornfully; demanded, with a purr in his voice:

"You people call yourselves the business end, don't you?" He sat down and bent an ivory paper cutter between his fingers. "Let me tell you what you really are," he informed them. "You're a lot of salaried parasites, without loyalty, without brains, without guts. For when it comes to a crisis,

when I need you . . . no! that's an empty term. . . . *I* need *you? You* need *me*! . . . why—you'd starve without me. If I should die tomorrow . . ." his voice dropped, deepened— "you couldn't get jobs as white-wings in the street cleaning department. I am the artist, the creator, eh? Well—and I know more about business than the whole damned lot of you put together!" The paper cutter snapped. He tossed the pieces on the floor and brushed his hands. "All right," he went on in a quiet, almost indifferent tone, "I'll do it myself—as I've always been forced to, in the last emergency. *I'll* get the money."

"You'll need at least fifty thousand dollars," Ben Levi reminded him drily.

"That all? You—you pikers . . . I'll get it within the next twenty-four hours."

They were amazed. He could almost always succeed in amazing them. But they were not incredulous. For each, deep in his heart, believed in the Cardoza legend.

They had seen the trappings and panoplies, the theatricals, the meretricious gilt and glamor of this same legend; yet knew that, at the core of it, under the props and the grease paint, was a measure of real truth, real beauty, real greatness, real art. Cardoza was the wizard, after all, the Broadway Midas whose touch revealed the hidden gold in things and

men. They believed in him; and he believed in himself . . . so consistently, his incredible vigor and enthusiasm rising up refreshed and reborn after failure as well as after success.

"Leave me alone!" he commanded them. "You've done nothing but waste my time. Get back to your figuring and ledgering and penny-pinching. I've work to do. *Your* work!"

They went, sheepishly enough, trailing out, talking in low tones. Only Katharine Healy remained; and, seeing her standing there, silent, unmoving, some of the fire in Cardoza died and he began to doubt himself—a little—just a little.

Not too much. Never too much.

"Damn Healy!" he thought. "She's a walking wet blanket . . ."

He turned on her, angrily:

"Don't sneer at me, Healy!"

"I'm not sneering, L. C."

"You are . . . and I won't have it," he insisted childishly. "I know what you're thinking. You think I'm bluffing. Well—I'm not! I'll show you!"

He jumped to his feet and paced up and down. The space, large as it was, appeared too restricted for him. He walked, striding on his short legs, into the inner studio, his hands behind his back, his chin sunk in his collar, in the approved Napoleonic atti-

tude of thought, of planning new strategical triumphs.

Then, suddenly, his chin came up.

"I've got it!" he cried. "I'll sell some of my collection!"

Katharine Healy had followed him. Now she paused, astonished.

The Guv'nor loved his possessions with a veritable passion, an almost sensuous love. Some he had bought cheaply. Some had been given to him by admirers of both sexes. But the majority he had purchased at high prices, regardless of the sums involved, because he had admired their beauty or rarity. Literally hundreds of thousands of dollars were invested in the curios, and he had never before considered selling as little as a jade snuffbox or a bit of early American pewter. Even Ben Levi, in moments of direst financial stress, had never dared suggest such a course. And the producer had often refused his wife some of the pieces which she particularly coveted. This was significant as, at least from a materialistic angle, he preferred to keep his wife in an excellent humor in order that, in all other ways, he might do as he pleased. He supported her in the grand manner. But his curios were his loves, and he hid the more precious ones quickly upon those occasions when his wife—her arrival

duly heralded by the warning system of bells—made a sudden descent upon the studio.

All this Katharine Healy knew . . . and she wondered: Cardoza willing to sell some of his hoarded treasures . . . because of the new play? There had been dozens of new plays in the past. He had launched so many of them—often hampered by lack of capital . . . and no such solution of the financial problem had heretofore occurred to him.

Therefore—because of the play . . . ?

Or because of—a sharp stab of suspicion and jealousy—Sally Cameron, red-headed, lithe-limbed Sally to whom he had promised her first big part . . . ?

Katharine Healy's lips tightened.

But she said nothing, merely stood beside Cardoza as he picked up objects, weighed them in his hand, sighed, replaced them, or set them reverently and tenderly upon an antique Spanish refectory table . . . a selection accompanied by sharp struggles, by remembering, and by spoken reminiscences.

The showman and, too, the poet came to the fore as, with each piece set aside, he told a tense little, dramatic story of its genesis, of how and when and where he had acquired it. And some of the tales were true, and some were gorgeous lies, and some were a mixture of truth and falsehood . . . and

every single one he believed himself in the moment of telling.

For instance, with a lovely, translucent, emerald-green jade elephant glowing in his white hand:

"Look at it, Healy!"

In reality, he had bought it for the exorbitant price of seventeen thousand dollars because, recklessly, he had wanted it. Reason enough!

But now . . .

"It was given to me—ah—" his black eyes misty — "by the delicious little widow of a Chinese merchant in San Francisco, as a memento of our—friendship! I shall never forget her. Plum Blossom, almond-eyed, golden-skinned. She was lovely—" he sighed; he put the elephant on the table— "I do not need this trinket—to remember—"

Katharine Healy sniffed. She recalled the very bill-of-sale for the jade; recalled Ben Levi's fit of despair. But why disillusion him? He was a child playing at make-believe; *her* child; the only one she would ever have . . . and she listened as he went on, holding between his palms the small ivory statuette of a nude young girl which he had bought for twenty dollars in a Seventh Avenue pawnshop, which he described now as:

"Made to my order by Rodin, the greatest artist of them all. You recognize the model? But—of course—" smiling— "*you* wouldn't. Rita Andrews.

Isn't it beautiful? Seven thousand I paid Rodin for it—nor grudged him his price!"

He came to an old carved comedy mask. Many years before, when he had been call boy for the late Augustin Daly, he had found it in the dusty storeroom of Daly's theatre and had appropriated it. It had real sentimental value for him. For it had been the first of his collection.

He said, with self-pity:

"One day—when I was very poor—my little daughter Tessie saw it in a curio dealer's window. It made her laugh. Gay, sudden laughter, like the ringing of small silver bells. Always a grave child . . . she laughed so seldom . . . and so I sold my mother's watch, her last gift to me, and bought the mask because it amused my child. I gave it to her to play with. Now she is dead. But here is her laughter, forever imprisoned, carved and chiseled in the static endurance of stone . . ."

"Now that," thought the tall, listening woman, "is certainly a lie. A black lie woven of purest hokum. And yet—just a little tragic. For he loved little Tessie—loved her dearly . . ." And her heart was soft and sore in her breast.

Piece after piece he selected, dramatizing each, while Katharine Healy made no comment, feeling moved against her will, as she was always moved, by the hands, the voice, the illuminated face, the

actor, the poet, the believer in himself. And at last twenty curios were put aside, and she telephoned to Twitchell Kennaday, the famous Madison Avenue antique dealer.

In less than half an hour Kennaday, curious and interested, made his amazing personal appearance.

He was a large Englishman with the face of a cherub which for æons has been nourished upon underdone chops, musty ale, and vintage champagne. An innocent cherub, you would say, a cherub turned out by Sackville Row. And you would be wrong. For he was not in the least innocent. He was shrewd, though honest to a fault, and he knew his business . . . too well as other antique dealers, trying to lock horns with him, had discovered to their sorrow and confusion.

He had always admired the Guv'nor. He listened to his proposal and nodded. Buy those things, there, on the table? Oh yes. Gladly.

"How much?" asked Cardoza, the *vox humana* stop pulled out fully. "How much—for all this beauty?"

The Englishman examined each piece minutely; paused a second; smoothed his chin; bent his brows.

Then:

"Well—" and generously—"five thousand for the lot."

The other clapped his hands to his ears as if they had been outraged.

"Five thousand?" he echoed. "Why—" and here he spoke the truth, Plum Blossom forgotten as she had never existed, while Katharine Healy chuckled silently— "I myself paid seventeen thousand dollars for that jade elephant . . ."

"It isn't jade, Mr. Cardoza. It's green quartz."

The Guv'nor gasped, cursed, imprecated:

"Oh—the robber—the fiend in dealer's guise!"

Kennaday inclined his wise head.

"I fancy it isn't the only thing where you paid through your nose," he said. "What did you pay for this—and this—and this . . . ?"

He pointed out what the curios were really worth; how, in the past, the producer had been cheated, overcharged.

"Five thousand!" he repeated.

Cardoza was furious. Even suppose the other was right and he had been overcharged . . . still . . .

"Five thousand?" he cried. "Five thousand miserable dollars for these lovely things which have lived with me—with *me?* Five thousand for a man's pulsing, throbbing soul . . . white hyacinths to nourish his spirit . . . ? Ah—out with you, Christian Jew! Out, Shylock of Madison Avenue!"

Kennaday, imperturbable, made a dignified exit; and Katharine Healy commented thoughtfully:

"That was rash of you, L. C."

"Why? Am I to stand here and allow my taste, my knowledge to be insulted by—ah—a Kennaday . . . a miserable, beefy, overfed British Kennaday?"

"It's never wise to make enemies, L. C. And you have too many already . . ."

She was right. She was always right.

For that night at the *Players' Club* the antique dealer, annoyed and affronted, told his experience to another producer, observing shrewdly:

"Rather fancy the old chap's cracking a bit—what?"

"Sure," replied the rival showman. "It won't be long now." He closed one small eye; added: "I guess I'll have a talk with Rita Andrews when she gets back."

CHAPTER SIX

IN the studio, Katharine Healy had forgotten Kennaday and her belated warning; had even forgotten Sally Cameron and her own, so easily awakened, jealousy and suspicion. Nothing mattered but Cardoza. He was like a hurt child that wanted a toy—Foster's play—an expensive toy.

Well—she'd buy it for him.

"L. C.," she said, "I've a few pennies saved up. And if . . ."

"Be quiet! Take money from a woman? I'd starve first!"

"You've taken money from women before this," she reminded him drily.

He shrugged his shoulders and said with a strange, abrupt tenderness:

"But never from you, Healy. No—never from you."

He walked over to her; lightly kissed her cheek; whispered:

"You're just a peach, Healy."

Then, suddenly:

"Come on! Even peaches must work—and God knows I overpay you!"

She smiled. They went back to their work.

At five o'clock she rose. Quitting time. Her fixed rule. At five sharp she was through, and, as always, he begged, threatened, bullied:

"An hour longer! I implore you!"

"Not even a minute longer!"

"I can't stand clock watchers. Healy, I—I'll fire you . . ."

"Suit yourself, L. C."

"Great work, creative work, isn't measured by time. Just half an hour more, Healy! Please!"

But she was resolute.

"Save your breath. You may overwork yourself. You're an old fool . . ."

"Damn it—you're as old as I!"

"Maybe. But not a fool. That is, not altogether. Au revoir, L. C."

She turned toward the small, private elevator when, sharply, dramatically, the warning bell signal shrilled.

Five terse, staccato rings.

"Mrs. Cardoza!" she exclaimed.

"Oh—" he cried— "quick . . . those curios on the refectory table . . . if I can't sell them I won't have them stolen . . . the insurance is too low . . ."

With her long, sure stride she went into the inner studio and flung a length of ancient Florentine velvet, which trailed from the back of a chair, over the pieces.

She left; and, a few moments later, Mrs. Leo Cardoza entered ponderously.

He greeted her with charm and courtesy and, looking at her, marveled that he had ever desired her. Years ago, in San Francisco, they had been married. At the time she had been far above him, socially and financially. At the time they had loved one another. Now they loved one another no longer. At the time she had been slim and beautiful. Now she was slim and beautiful no longer.

The large, overdressed, over-jeweled woman sat down plumply. He raised her hand to his lips, and she smiled.

"Never mind, Leo," she said. "You've no audience but me . . . and I don't count."

He laughed whole-heartedly.

"I've always admired your frankness, Miriam," he answered, truthfully enough. "It's so refreshing."

"Well—" she rejoined, not acknowledging, even to herself, that she was a little flattered— "I'll continue to be refreshingly frank. I'm going on a trip around the world."

"I'm not hindering you."

"Write me a check, then."

"Use your own money," he advised her, with a bluntness quite equal to her own. "You've been hoarding it for years—in banks—stocks—wall safes—in, I suppose, stocking heels."

"I'll not use my own money. Why should I? You have plenty."

"No. I haven't a cent."

"Nonsense!"

"I give you my word . . ."

"What difference would that make, Leo? I've read that you bought a new play. That costs money, doesn't it?"

"Five hundred dollars advance royalties to Foster. Had to scrape the till for it. But I can't produce the play . . ."

He frowned. Then, suddenly, an idea came to him.

He leaned forward, touched her hand upon which good, blue-white diamonds shone with others not quite so good.

"The play," he said, "is sure-fire. Miriam, you've invested the money I gave you in the past. Come in with me on this play . . . we'll go fifty-fifty on the profits . . . your share will be large . . . we'll be partners once more . . ."

She ignored the sentimental note, the very real plea in his fine eyes and moving voice. She laughed.

"Forget it! Me invest money in a play? I'm no back-stage angel. I know too much about Broadway . . . and I know too much about you."

He sat back, momentarily defeated, angry that he had lowered his banner to her, ashamed that he had so definitely exhibited to her his emergency, his humiliating need.

"All right," he said sullenly. "But you'll be sorry."

"I? No! *You'll* be sorry—unless you come through with a check!"

"But—" in exasperation— "I haven't a cent . . . I swear to you . . ."

"You'll have to find it. Or—" she rose, looked at him, her still lovely eyes and her entire, large, billowing person one incarnate threat—"my teeth are not all drawn, darling!"

So she left him, sunken in his chair, that curious, episcopal air which was so peculiarly his own more striking than ever. He seemed like an old priest whose altar—the altar which, for so many years, he had served—had been defiled by the barbarians, the unbelievers.

After a time he returned to the small studio.

Day was drawing to its close. Sunshine dropped to meet the rush of oncoming evening, glowing on Broadway with molten gold and copper.

He sat down, forgetting to turn on the lights.

Ghostly shadows trooped about the walls; grimaced at him from dusky corners. He was alone.

He was in a black, black mood. He was oppressed. He was smothered. He was battling with spectres. What would he do, where turn?

The theatre—he loved it . . . it was his life, his whole life . . . and he thought:

"I've given Broadway, America, the world itself of my best, the marrow of my soul—without stint. The others—these young jackanapes of the Playgoers' Guild for instance—where would they be today had I not pioneered . . . had I not broken the hard path for them . . . pointed the way . . . ?"

It was true. He had been the first to cut away from soulless, stifling classicism; the first to use a blending of superb romanticism and authentic realism; the first to invent a dozen electrical and mechanical stage devices which he had never taken the trouble to patent and make pay . . . because the theatre was his real love . . . his only love, he thought now . . . and trembled.

"I've a play," he told himself, "a splendid play. "I've a great little actress—young, lovely, talented . . . and I'm baffled, conquered—because of a few thousand dollars!"

Dollars!

Money!

He hated it; hated the people who, smugly, pos-

sessed it. For at heart, like most artists, he was a radical.

Sitting there alone in the thronging shadows, he recalled the men he had known in his youth, his early manhood; men with not a modicum of his brain, his vitality, his vision, his genius. Yet they had one gift: that of money making. He thought briefly of Julius Beck, the banker, squatting in Wall Street like a fat, repulsive, white-mustached, pink-faced spider—weaving his sticky webs—rich, rich, rich . . . while he, Leo Cardoza, was poor, was fettered because of a miserable little sum which would mean less than a dime's value to the other.

"Damn his soul!" whispered Cardoza, getting up stiffly and walking about, while the shadows leered at him.

Beck—had everything. Money. Power. Ruthlessness. And—yes—Ruth Hoyt. Beck had her. What of it if he, Cardoza, was done with her? That didn't matter. Once his property, always his property!

He sat down again, near the desk. He flung his arms across its unyielding surface, abased his white head.

He was lonely.

Dear Lord God—how lonely he was!

He sobbed aloud—a muffled, strange, eerie sound . . . and, in the inner studio, the bent little Hun-

garian cleaning woman heard, and her duster slipped from her gnarled, reddened hand.

She did not know what the sound was. But, somehow, she was frightened. She crossed herself; mumbled a prayer:

"Mary—full of grace . . ."

She listened, fearing. Would the sound come again? And she started as there was a knock on the iron-barred outer door.

She hesitated; then opened the door.

Sally Cameron came in, smiling, her "sides"—her typewritten part in *Bedrock*—in her hand.

The Guv'nor, who had already begun to rehearse her in it, had given her permission to come to him whenever she wished to consult him. Today, reading over the lines to let the character sink in and become part of herself, one scene had not rung true, and she had come to the studio, aflame to discuss it with him.

She crossed the inner room with her light, buoyant step; stood on the threshold of the small studio, and looked about inquiringly.

It was dark. She saw no one.

Then a shadow stirred among shadows, and she heard Cardoza say, aloud, despairingly:

"God . . . is this the end . . . ? I have eaten my soul—torn my heart for nothing . . . for the bitter dregs of nothing at all!"

Sally's own heart ached. She was afraid. She was deeply embarrassed. She was terribly sorry. She had intruded upon heaven knows what communion between a man's naked soul and its maker . . .

At once, quietly, she turned to go. But he had heard her.

He looked up; saw her; jumped to his feet, brushing his hand across his eyes.

"Sally!" he spoke eagerly, gaily. "I'm so glad you came, child. Did you hear? It's the line I've been looking for . . . the line you need . . . in the second act, just after your quarrel with 'Lester' . . . listen—I'll say it again . . ."

And as she watched him, her eyes big with bewilderment, he repeated, stagily, deliberately overstressing, over-accentuating:

"God . . . is this the end . . . ? I have eaten my soul—torn my heart for nothing . . . for the bitter dregs of nothing at all!"

He paused; appeared to think; shook his head.

"A little too theatrical," he decided; considering, with a cutting self-irony, that to be human was the greatest farce of all; that this past, lonely, genuine moment would be too theatrical for the stage, might get a laugh from the audience; and, smiling very slightly, he edited the lines:

"God . . . is this the end . . . for nothing . . . ?"

He clapped his hands.

"That's it, Sally. And no storm of tears. Just the one sob, broken, defeated. Oh . . . I'm a better actor than all my actors, eh, Sally?"

"You're wonderful, Guv'nor. Why, when I came in, for a moment I imagined . . ."

"That it was real? I was never paid a finer compliment in all my life! And now . . . feel like working for a while, child?"

"Of course. I had come to ask you about that scene with 'Lester.' It disturbed me. Didn't ring true. Now, with your line added, I can visualize it . . ."

They began to rehearse, in the small studio. He gave her the cue lines, played the parts opposite her, played her own.

"Sit down, Sally . . . droop your head . . . no, no . . . a little more to the left . . . the footlights are over there . . . where Tessie's portrait is . . . still more to the left . . . no—wait . . . watch me . . . *so!*"

And he became on the instant the unhappy girl to whom her father's change of fortune had brought only sorrow and astonishment; became the father, the mother, the miners' mob. He had no word or look for Griggs who came in. He worked with Sally, going over the same line, the same gesture, the same scene, time after time.

Nine o'clock came, and Griggs sent out for sup-

per. They ate, still discussing the play in all its implications. Then, when the tray was taken out, they went back to rehearsing.

Ten o'clock. Eleven o'clock. Midnight.

Sally was dropping with fatigue. Perspiration dampened her red hair till it curled tightly to her wet forehead. Her eyes were circled darkly, and she began to shake with nervousness.

Cardoza noticed. He broke off short, in the middle of a scene.

"Enough!" he cried. Then he laughed. "Tomorrow—no, today—is my birthday. You're invited, Sally. A party of my own people. Four o'clock. Coffee and cake. And I'll present your playwright, Robert Foster, to you. Jack—" to the secretary— "phone to him, will you?"

Sally flushed a little.

She started to say: "But I already know him . . ." and did not say it.

It was part of the Guv'nor's plan to introduce them. She did not want to disappoint him. And there was yet another reason why she was silent; a reason which lay deep and inarticulate; a reason caused by congenital, subconscious feminine wisdom; a reason rather substantiated when Cardoza went on, jestingly, yet with an undercurrent of real jealousy:

"Foster's a good-looking boy. Don't you dare fall in love with him!"

He laughed; and Sally's laughter, silver but uncertain, blended with his.

Now he was himself again. All his belief in himself had come sweeping, surging back during the rehearsal. His vanity battened on the trust, the admiration in Sally's eyes.

"I'll show this town!" he thought. "And I'll get the money—I'll get it . . . somewhere—somehow . . ."

Shortly afterwards he and Griggs took Sally home. They left the theatre. Beneath a golden, ironic moon Broadway curved, a magnificent and tawdry gesture . . . the gesture of modern Babylon toward the barbaric extremities of Albany, Boston, Philadelphia . . . or, at least, so it seemed to the Guv'nor as he stood for a moment, answering the greeting of the night watchman, the salute of a passing cop.

Broadway. *His* Broadway.

And, beyond Broadway, the outer darkness . . . and he himself the master of this far-flung battle line, the Napoleon, the conqueror . . . and all the other struggling producers negligible atoms, slavish imitators!

His car, an old model, dark-red Packard, was drawn up at the curb. Griggs, whose manifold

duties included that of chauffeur, got behind the wheel, and Cardoza took his seat beside Sally.

The ride was silent enough. She leaned back against the upholstery, tired, happy, while the Guv'nor was deep in thought.

Once he raised her listless, lovely hand to his lips, kissed it lightly, and told her with a note of tenderness, yet tenderness so paternal that she remained unstartled and unwarned:

"I like you, little Miss Sally. Oh—I like you tremendously!"

"And I like you, Guv'nor," she answered, gratefully, truthfully.

"Your next play I shall write myself. I have the perfect title for it."

"What?" Sally wanted to know, her pulse quickening.

"*The Image in the Heart,*" he said sonorously. "How do you like it?"

"Lovely!" she cried, while Griggs, in the driver's seat, overheard and smiled.

The Image in the Heart . . . the play, never written, perhaps never to be written, which the Guv'nor had promised to Rita Andrews, to Ruth Hoyt, to many others—driving through these same streets in this same dark-red Packard.

They left Sally at her apartment house and drove through Central Park for an hour or more at the

Guv'nor's orders. He had been silent for quite a while. Now, for no reason Griggs could discover, all at once he exclaimed:

"Fight on all occasions!"

"What's that, Guv'nor? Line from the new play?"

"No, you poor, unlettered imbecile! It's the advice of d'Artagnan's father to d'Artagnan. Capital advice, too. For—you see—if you fight on all occasions you're sure to win occasionally, by the law of averages . . ."

"Well, Guv'nor, I'd like to fight *you*—for a raise in pay."

"You're neither d'Artagnan nor Cardoza, Jack. You lose!"

They drove on. Their course through the Park took them far uptown, away from the twinkling lights of Fifth Avenue and the Plaza. Over to the left Cardoza saw other lights shining dimly through the trees and shrubbery of a great garden, a private garden, and, as they left the Park and passed an all-night drug store, he ordered sharply:

"Stop. Telephone Julius Beck's house. See if he's home."

Griggs was taken aback. Was the Guv'nor, he wondered, going to "fight on all occasions" . . . in other words, to go to the mat with the great

financier, at this time of night, because of Ruth Hoyt?

"But . . ." he expostulated weakly.

"Do as I tell you, Jack. If Beck is in, inform him I shall be at his house immediately."

Griggs shook his gray head, but obeyed. Shortly afterwards, he came out of the drug store and reported that Mr. Beck would be glad to see Mr. Cardoza.

A few minutes later, the Packard drew up at the Beck residence that overlooked the Park, yet had no need for that green, public playground. For the house was in the middle of a garden—a garden in the heart of New York City . . . a garden which covered an entire block, with the moon dancing through the heavy foliage in fleeting silver arabesques, and beyond a small white marble palace, cool and gleaming, before which fountains tossed their spray like fluid incense before an altar; a house pagan in its Greek simplicity, a dream of the old days when the heart of the world was young and golden with laughter and lithe-limbed, big-eyed, naked children danced to the fluting of Pan; a house which caused the Guv'nor to exclaim, more indignant than envious:

"Done well for himself—Julius—since, forty years ago, he landed at the Battery, a clumsy, loutish emigrant boy from Frankfurt!"

But forty years had worked miracles in the inner and, too, the outer man. Grudgingly Cardoza admitted it as, leaving the nervous and unhappy Griggs to wait in the car, he was taken by a solemn and drowsy man servant to an enormous, panelled room which looked like a library—was indeed a library, if rather exaggeratedly—with two Gutenberg Bibles where only one should be and the bindings of the many books hand-tooled.

Julius Beck was there to meet him. No longer loutish. No longer clumsy. But, in his plain, dark dressing gown, surprisingly good-looking, white-mustached, rosy-skinned, and, oddly enough, reminiscent of a retired colonel of British cavalry.

He greeted the other without astonishment. It was this quality of acceptance, of unsurprise, which had helped make his fortune for him. If he questioned or feared the object of the producer's late visit, no sign appeared in his manner.

They sat down, Cardoza instinctively selecting a great, dark chair, not too high from the ground for his short legs, his head cut sharply as a silver medallion against the rich brocade, while the banker, at his huge desk, waved a hospitable hand toward a table with decanters, glasses, ice, and humidors.

"Drink, Leo? A cigarette?"

"I never drink—and I never smoke."

Beck lit a cigar.

"When did you turn anchorite?" he asked, smiling beneath the white, trim mustache.

"Anchorite? No. But I do not care to blunt my delicate senses so alive to beauty . . ."

"Beauty animate as well as inanimate?" countered the banker, his coarseness cloaked by delicacy of phrasing.

He sneered a little as he spoke. Ruth had told him of her interview with the Guv'nor. An expurgated account. She had gone to him merely, she had said, for a new play and had been refused—out of spite. Cardoza was silent; and Beck, accustomed to taking the bull by the horns in his business when any gentler, less obvious method was not indicated, did so now, saying calmly, even casually, hiding his genuine embarrassment:

"Miss Hoyt told me she'd seen you. Too bad you can't find a play for her. Of course," he went on felinely, "she could be backed—in her own production—by me . . ."

Cardoza waved a negligent hand.

"Let's talk about that some other time."

"Not now, eh, Leo?"

"Not now. Enough playing with words. I know what you're thinking . . ."

"Oh . . . ? About . . . ?"

"Ruth. What is she . . . ?"

"A rather pretty woman, I would say, Leo?"

"Yes. But—only a woman. Women are to me the sunny spots along a dark and lonely path. They are flowers in a garden. They bring me light, charm, perfume. Well—one changes one's perfume occasionally—and flowers become wilted. Women touch my heart. But they do not affect my soul. Therefore—I hold no grudge—not the least grudge, Julius."

The latter drew a breath of relief. Then, again sure of himself, again with a sneer, he demanded:

"And this visit—between midnight and morning—is it purely social?"

"No. A business call. I need you."

Beck's small eyes were alert. He murmured emptily: "If I can be of service to you . . . ?" And he waited, while Cardoza went on:

"We started from nothing, you and I. You made millions and hoarded them. I made millions and threw them away—to create beauty and enjoyment, nightly, for thousands of Americans. You have invested in bonds. I have invested in art. And—I have ten times your brain."

The banker chuckled.

"You have, have you?" he questioned—but with admiration.

"Yes. I know it. You know it. Had I turned my mind to the piling up of round, clinking dollars

I could have beaten you at your own game, Julius. But I didn't care. And today—" the sonorous voice faltered, broke slightly— "today you sit here before me . . . you have the woman whom I dreamed of making a great actress . . . you have this marble setting for your powers . . . you have uncounted cash in a dozen banks. And I have nothing but memories—and ambitions. Superb ambitions, Julius. Ambitions which demand money. Listen—I have a new play—a fine play . . . a play that will make theatrical history—and not a cent to produce it with. Julius—give me the money—and repay your debt to art—repay your debt to your own youth when you, too, dreamed of beauty!"

Cardoza halted, breathing quickly, and the other was moved.

For Julius Beck had a strong passion for things of enduring beauty; fancied himself as Art's self-elected patron; had subsidized many a publicity expert and public relations counsel, from Ed Bernays to Oliver Tayler, so that his fame as a Maecenas might spread from New York to London and from the Atlantic to the Pacific. He used this fame shrewdly. It gave him a thin wedge, as for instance through his financial backing of operatic ventures and intellectual little-theatre enterprises, with which to pry open the door of diehard Chris-

tian society. Still, his passion for beauty was genuine; genuine, too, his envy of people who created beauty; and, over all the long years they had known one another, he had envied Cardoza—because the latter's name was a household word as a creator of the very things which he himself tried to patronize.

Besides, there was Ruth Hoyt.

When he had taken her away from the other, he had felt conscious of a certain gratified vanity. Ruth Hoyt—Cardoza's mistress—made more treasurable to Julius Beck's jealous, acquisitive mind through the very fact that she *had* been Cardoza's mistress—that he *had* taken her away from the latter . . .

It reminded him of the triumphant moment when he had wrested control of the Y. M. & L. Railway from Titus Jones, the Cleveland financier.

Titus Jones had come to him, defeated, asking for a loan . . . and here, now, the Guv'nor, too, came to him, begging him for money—with humility.

Proud humility? Yes. Still—humility.

And the banker's chest, slightly pigeon-breasted, expanded under the fine silk undershirt, and he asked:

"How much do you need, Leo?"

"One hundred thousand dollars," Cardoza replied without a quiver.

"Very well."

Beck opened a drawer and pulled out a check book. He wrote the sum slowly, savoring a curious sense of triumph and a yet more curious sense of artistic pride. He blotted his signature and handed the slip of green paper to the other whose face did not change.

"There you are, Leo."

"Thank you," came Cardoza's simple rejoinder.

He received the check as a king receives a just tribute. He smiled at the banker with friendliness; but the friendliness which stoops. He never lowered his banner before an audience; not even when that audience had just saved him from bankruptcy—and without security.

He stayed a few moments longer, speaking sympathetically of some of Beck's recent financial exploits—loans to foreign nations, a new steamship line—and so took a dignified departure, with Beck escorting him to the beautiful bronze door.

The banker returned to the library. He poured himself a drink.

He was a little thoughtful, wondering if he had made a fool of himself, wondering if the check represented a strange kind of overpayment for Miss Hoyt, wondering if he had been hypnotized

. . . and feeling, at the same time, as if he had had a tremendous favor granted him instead of having given one hundred thousand dollars—the interest on how much?—for . . . nothing. Yes. For nothing. Because of a man's amazing magnetism and astonishing eloquence.

Beck smiled, rather sourly. Cardoza boasted of having thrown away thousands—on the stage—on the fine turn of a phrase?

Well—he, Julius Beck, had done the same damned fool thing . . . not on the stage—but in his own library . . .

And he poured out another drink, while the producer descended the marble steps, smiling secretly.

But when he climbed into the car and Jack Griggs asked nervously: "Well, Guv'nor?", his face was grave, even faintly disturbed.

"Nothing, nothing, Jack. Julius and I just had a little talk. Drive home quickly. My head aches."

He smiled again as the car purred into motion.

The check? He would keep it as a surprise, a sort of Jack Horner pie out of which would come stage settings, props, actors . . . all the paraphernalia of production—to be opened at his birthday party; and when Griggs suggested that the party should be called off, stammering something about the bad financial situation and that a slight attack

of flu might serve as an excuse, the Guv'nor exclaimed:

"Excuse? No. Let my people celebrate. Often, in the past, when my birthday came, they fêted my success. Ah—" and he appeared to hide an ironic smile— "let them celebrate this year the tragic fact that, for no good reason, I've lived another twelve months!"

And, as Griggs stared at him in bewilderment, he cried, superbly the actor:

"Laugh, clown, laugh!"

CHAPTER SEVEN

FOUR o'clock that afternoon.

The tables in the small studio were laden with cups, plates, bottles of wine, cakes, steaming coffee pots. Flowers, the deep-colored, perfumed flowers of midsummer, were everywhere.

They came in, by ones and twos, all the people of the staff, men and women, from the business manager to the youngest office boy, from the chief electrician to the humblest grips.

They brought congratulations. They loved him —though they feared him.

"Many happy returns, Guv'nor!"

"You look great, Guv'nor!"

"Hope you'll be happy next year, Guv'nor!"

Robert Foster arrived, followed a minute later by Sally Cameron. Cardoza introduced them to each other, adding with a hint of dramatics:

"You two'll make each other's fortunes . . . yes, Bob, Miss Cameron's your leading lady . . ."

Sally and Foster looked at each other, smiled at each other. They had not met since that night in

Central Park. Now, during that one glance, they again established their communion, their emotional relation; silently agreed to play out the little comedy of never having met before—as long as they had an audience.

A messenger came in with a plain box. Cardoza opened it and exposed another birthday cake in all its white and pink glory. There was a note, from a young Richmond society girl who had sat next to the Guv'nor at a dinner and was excessively stage-struck.

He read the note aloud to the polite plaudits of the guests:

"*Baked with my own hands. I do hope you will enjoy it, dear Mr. Cardoza.*"

He was moved.

"With her own hands! The darling!" He turned to Foster and said eagerly: "We must find her a part in our play, Bob."

Katharine Healy sniffed audibly, and Foster looked at her in some amusement and curiosity.

During all his crowded days in the studio he had found time to wonder about this tall, ironic woman with the violet-blue eyes; beautiful eyes, though at times they had the peculiar, aggressive expression which belongs to the eyes of Anglo-Saxon spinsters who ask leading, but tactless questions at political gatherings.

"What's the matter, Healy?" asked the producer.

"Not a thing, L. C."

"You sniffed!" he accused her.

"Perfect right to sniff, haven't I?"

"Never mind. Cut the cake, please."

She was about to plunge the silver knife into the sculptural, frosted sweetness when she noticed how perfect was the candied decoration. Too perfect. With sudden suspicion, to the surprise of the onlookers, she turned the cake upside down. Stamped upon the bottom was the name of a famous Fifth Avenue caterer.

She held it up for all the world to see; read the name aloud with blighting sarcasm.

"Baked with her own hands!" she mocked. "'The darling'!"

Cardoza, a little dashed, recovered rapidly.

"Nevertheless," he insisted, gallantly, stubbornly, "she deserves a part—because of the cleverness of her ruse. She *is* a darling!"

"Floozy—that's what she is!" commented Katharine Healy.

"Oh—" Cardoza seemed shocked—"Healy. . . ."

"All right. Hussy—if you prefer! All the women who come to you are hussies!"

"You don't include me, do you?" laughed Sally Cameron.

The older woman looked down at the charming little face. Her heart was pierced by a two-edged sword of fear and pity.

"That remains to be seen," she answered bitterly —and yet uncertainly; then, quickly, turned to the Guv'nor who, as usual, was overeating, cramming an enormous piece of cake into his mouth, his fifth cup of coffee in his hand. She took it away from him. "Good Lord," she exclaimed, "what a glutton you are! Do you want to dig your grave with your teeth, L. C.?"

"But I'm having such a good time, Healy," he pleaded, like a child.

He was, indeed, having an excellent time. But the others, the office force, were not, though they were playing their little parts bravely enough, trying to make the birthday a success, to forget the storm clouds, to fake a merriment which none of them felt, and in each heart the cankering fear:

"What'll become of me if the Guv'nor gives up producing?"

Each could have obtained a job with rival producers. None—call it the result of loyalty, or of hypnosis or self-hypnosis—looked to that possibility.

Griggs, perhaps, had a small fortune ready to his hand. He had been the Guv'nor's confidant so long. There was no "dirt" he did not know. He

could have sold out to rival showmen or to the yellow sheets. But, though he was always in need, at times for as little as a five spot, not even the shadow of temptation had brushed his mind, and he thought with the rest:

"Suppose he gives up producing . . . ?"

The fear of it and, more, the fear of Cardoza's death, was ever present and terrifying to all. Without him they would be like sheep without a wether to lead them—footling, rather tragic sheep—and this knowledge, this gray apprehension, was one reason why each, in his own fashion, looked after the Guv'nor as if he had been a brittle piece of porcelain.

Talented second-raters all of them, except Katharine Healy and Ben Levi.

The former alone, this afternoon, did not play a part. Nor was the disturbing question uppermost in her mind. She *knew* what would happen to her. She did not question fate. If the Guv'nor gave up producing, she would still find her place in his empty life. If he died—well—she would die, too, just as a lamp burns out for lack of the oil which has nourished and kept bright the golden flame.

Foster and Sally knew nothing of all these undercurrents; did not see that the general happiness was make-believe. They circulated about, talking

to everybody, laughing, jesting, making friends or enemies as the case might be, and eventually found themselves alone for a moment.

"Sally," said the playwright, "you've not forgotten?"

"No."

"I've kept to my bargain—never came near you—never wrote . . . but—it's been hard, dear . . ."

Cardoza's ears were sharp. He caught no word. But the tone of Foster's voice impressed, disturbed him, and he saw Sally flush. He watched a moment; then motioned her to his side.

"My little star—" he said, with a loud voice—"and to twinkle on Broadway . . . soon, very soon!"

Soon?

The staff exchanged glances. Powers whispered to Ben Levi who shook his head, and Donaldson raised an eyebrow and a wineglass.

Soon? How? With no money?

And Cardoza rose to his feet. The time had come to triumph over these little people who dubbed themselves business men, to excite their admiration and wonder, to set off the fireworks.

"Children!" He produced the check, very much like a conjuror who materializes a rabbit from his hat. "The country is saved!" He waved the slip of green paper. "One hundred thousand dollars! Here,

in my hand! Twice what we need! On to Gettysburg!"

He was not cheated of his sensation. A babble of exclamations, a cheer or two greeted his announcement. Only practical Ben Levi kept his head—and his congenital doubt.

He approached the producer.

"May I—oh—see the check?"

"Think it's a bit of props? Here, Ben."

The latter saw the sum, the signature.

"But—" he demanded in a whisper— "what security, Guv'nor?"

The reply was loud, so that all could hear:

"Security? My name—and my fame! Isn't that security enough?"

Then, at once, while once more applause burst forth, he became the general, marshalling his forces, directing his strategies. He called Hadley, the publicity man, to him.

"Write—no—telegraph, telephone the advance notices to the newspapers. And—Deane . . ."

"Yes, Guv'nor?"

"We begin casting at once. Let me have my private list of actors. And send word to the agencies . . ."

"Very well, Guv'nor!"

"Hop to it!"

Hadley and Powers left, and Cardoza addressed the art director:

"Bruce!"

"Guv'nor?"

"You sail for Paris tomorrow. I'll talk to you tonight. I want some stuff—antiques—for the third act." And to Hesse: "Herman, get Bruce his steamship reservation and a letter of credit . . . let's say ten thousand dollars . . ."

"But, Guv'nor," interrupted Donaldson, his canny Scot's soul squirming, "we can get all we need here in town—much better—"

"And cheaper!" chimed in Ben Levi.

"Cheaper? Yes. Better? No. I will have things genuine—authentic."

Here Robert Foster raised a voice, reminding the producer that the play was, after all, American, laid in a Montana mining camp with the exception of the last act which took place in the home of a self-made millionaire.

"Exactly!" smiled Cardoza. "That's why his antiques must be authentic." He winked at Katharine Healy and jerked a thumb, pointing through the open door at the refectory table with the curios he had tried to sell to Kennaday. He laughed; went on: "All *authentic* millionaires have *authentic* antiques, eh, Healy?"

He gave more orders, to everybody, rushing

about like a tidy little whirlwind; and so, on this note of excitement and bustle, the birthday party ended, and the late editions of the evening papers brought the first advance notices to all Broadway.

And straightway all Broadway became a vast beehive, buzzing, buzzing, seeking a share of golden honey . . ."

Rival producers buzzed:

"Wonder what the Guv'nor's got up his sleeve!"

"Tough old dog! Never says die!"

The *Lambs,* the *Friars,* the *Green Room Club* buzzed. All the theatrical agencies buzzed. Actors and actresses, in jobs or out, buzzed, in tenor, baritone, basso, alto, mezzo-soprano . . . and falsetto:

"Guess I'll drop around tomorrow and have a chin-chin with Deane."

"Same here."

"I'd like to work for the Guv'nor."

"That old bozo knows a thing or two."

"Sure!"

The property room, downstairs in the Cardoza theatre, buzzed. The wardrobe room buzzed. Everything in that huge theatrical rabbit warren buzzed with excitement, orders, expectations . . . expectations before battle—before victory . . . bound to be victory . . . you bet—the Guv'nor . . . God bless him!

And they buzzed, buzzed, buzzed. And so did

Rita Andrews buzz, with irritation, annoyance, as, the following morning, her train pulled into Grand Central Station and, twenty minutes later, in her smart Park Avenue apartment, she read a paper while her tub was filling.

Theatrical news. Cast and forecast. Cardoza . . .

Eh? A new play? A new actress?

Sally Cameron?

Rita lit a cigarette. Her superb eyes were cloudy. Her crimson, rather lax mouth hardened.

"Cameron . . . ? Never heard of her. It'll be a flop," she decided, "as the Hoyt show was a flop!"

Still—she mused, rising, walking into the bathroom and, presently, letting the scented water flow over her satin skin, relaxing her tired muscles—still—wiser to have a pow-wow with the Guv'nor about it . . .

"Why should he get away with murder?" she demanded of her reflection in many mirrors.

So, after a while, wrapped in a sinuous length of scarlet silk, coffee and grapefruit before her, she picked up the telephone, asked for Bryant 3163, and was put through to Griggs.

"Jack? Rita talking," she said in her husky, charming voice. "Just got back."

"That's great! How are you, sweetheart?"

"Never better. Tell the Guv'nor I'll be over this afternoon. And—Jack . . ."

"Yes . . . ?"

"Between you and me and the alley cat . . . what's the dirt on this Cameron dame?"

"No dirt, Miss Rita."

"Tell it to the marines, dearie. Never mind. I'll find out the low-down all right, all right."

Cardoza laughed when Griggs reported the conversation.

"Jealous, the little Rita?" he commented. "That's good! She's been getting out of hand."

But he forgot all about Rita in that day's hectic work, with casting in full swing, actors to be interviewed, and Deane Power's office, the tiny waiting-room, the stairs and the theatre lobby crowded with jobless, job-hunting players, each with his or her cogent reason why he or she should be the only one engaged; and into that day, like a heavy stone through a paper hoop, crashed Mrs. Cardoza and faced her husband at his desk.

"You lied to me about the money," she accused him. "You had it all the time you told me you were broke."

He smiled, and she continued, in a rage:

"I've stood for the way you treat me. I've stood for all your women. I've never complained . . ."

"Haven't you, though?"

"What of it? Who has a better right?" she con-

tradicted herself. "And now—this petty, mean lie . . ."

"It wasn't a lie, Miriam," he said quietly.

"Not a lie? What about your new play? Producing it, aren't you? It'll cost you a pretty penny. I know your extravagance. Well—I want my share . . . my trip around the world . . . or I'll make trouble—even at this late date."

"I don't care," he told her coolly, "all publicity, even bad publicity, is good."

"I don't mean publicity in your sense. I mean —divorce."

That arrested his negligent attention.

"Divorce . . . you would . . . ?"

"Yes. All these years I've been your wife—in name only," she cried, verity in her bathos, "always in the background . . . a barrier . . . so that no other woman could force your hand and make you marry her . . ."

"You're wrong," he cut in. But she had spoken the truth. She had been the practical barrier. He could not do without her. He told her as much. "I cannot do without you, Miriam. Do not be hasty . . . reconsider! You've been more than wife in name. You've been—ah—" his acting was superb— "my good angel, my other self!" He rose, walked up to her, laid his hands on her thick shoulders. "I admit the other women," he whispered,

softly, sorrowfully. "I'm an artist, a creator. I cannot be bound by conventional laws. I need beauty, youth, glowing youth . . . it inspires me—it rests me. But you . . . you are the core of my heart. Always I return to you. I . . . I need you, dear . . ."

She was touched, flattered. But her doubt and her grievance did not depart.

"And yet—" she repeated—"you lied to me—about the money."

"No, dear. I did not have the money then. I raised it—yesterday."

"How?"

He hesitated. Should he tell her the truth? No. She was shrewd enough to know that, if he had borrowed from Julius Beck, it had been a large sum. Then she would demand her share with a vengeance.

So he said, slowly, grievously:

"I've sold some of my antiques."

"And you wouldn't give me the few I wanted!" she cried, enraged and jealous once more.

There her mental process paralleled Katharine Healy's, that so different woman, in the same situation. Had he sold them—the precious curios he had often denied to her, his wife—for the sake of a play, or the sake of a woman—Sally Cameron . . . ? And she was about to continue her

tirade when her husband, who had been thinking quickly, took her arm, drew her to the inner studio, and, his great idea coming to him on the spur of the moment, pulled aside the trailing length of velvet and exposed the antiques which he had not sold, could not sell, at his price, to Kennaday.

"Look!" he said dramatically. "I saved these—from the humiliating wreck—for you!"

He touched them, one by one. Finally he picked up the little ivory statuette, the statuette which had beckoned to him from a pawnbroker's window, which he had told Katharine Healy had been made for him by Rodin to capture eternally Rita Andrews' beauty.

"Ah—" he went on, and tears were in his eyes—"isn't it lovely? I've never shown it to you—never told you . . . I was afraid you'd mock me. I bought it in memory of our youth. It reminded me of you, Miriam . . . for you were beautiful, my dear . . . the great, soft eyes—the slender limbs . . . so beautiful . . . the wife of my youth, the mate of my hot, dreaming blood! You—you were so much above me, Miriam. I was not fit to tie your little shoelace. Yet you stooped to love me . . . and . . . you have often stooped to forgive me . . ."

His voice quivered into silence.

She sighed deeply.

His voice! It took her back—so far back—to all she had had, yet had never possessed; to all she had lost, yet never—so curious a thing is memory—entirely.

"I guess," she told him quite gently, "I'll have to keep on forgiving you. Leo—I hate you . . . and yet, somehow, I love you. You know—after all—you *are* the Wizard of Broadway . . . the Guv'nor of Broadway!"

She opened her capacious, old-fashioned hand-bag, more like a satchel than anything else, and overcome by sentiment and cupidity—for the Guv'nor had been known to change his mind—she swept the jades and quartz and ivories and silver into it and shut it with a snap.

"I'll pay for my own passage," she capitulated, "and then—if the play's a success—you'll buy me that square diamond bracelet, won't you, Leo?"

"I shall," he told her, raising her hand to his lips. "Diamonds become you, Miriam."

He took her to the door of the little elevator. Then, when he was alone, his hands behind his back, he performed a gay little breakdown dance, whistling under his breath.

Katharine Healy came in; stared.

"What's the matter, Guv'nor?"

"Nothing, Healy!"

"Two to one you're lying! What *is* the matter? Been drinking?"

"Yes. Of the wine of youth—my own youth . . . the wine of success. You know, Healy, I've got a damned good opinion of myself!"

"Hm . . ." she sniffed, and she and the Guv'nor plunged furiously into the interrupted work.

CHAPTER EIGHT

RITA ANDREWS came that afternoon.

Small she was, with the sort of heavy, black hair which has rusty high-lights in the sun. She had not bobbed it and wore it drawn back from her clear, pale brow. Her red mouth had soft, indistinct curves, vague, childlike, appealing, even a little pathetic, and giving the lie direct to her eyes —amazingly clever eyes, eyes of ancient sophistication.

"Dear child!" Cardoza greeted her; and, holding her at arm's length, after bestowing the customary, more or less utilitarian, kiss: "You look lovelier than ever."

"Thanks for the buggy ride, darling," she remarked lightly, sat down near his desk, and yawned like a delicate, pampered Persian kitten.

"Feeling all right?"

"Except for the all night ride. Never can sleep in a train. And my apartment—remember I let Florrie Collier have it while I was away? Well—she must

have thrown some parties! Half the furniture is ruined."

He commiserated; then spoke of her recently closed play.

"You were superb. The play itself was splendid." He had written it, yet his tone was impersonal. "The public mind is hard to gauge."

"Past history. The point is—" coming sharply to the attack— "got a new play for me?"

"Not yet."

"What do you mean—not yet?"

"You understand English—after a fashion—don't you?" he inquired with a deliberate dig at her immigrant forbears. Then, as her eyes hardened, he added soothingly: "But later on I intend to write a play for you myself. I have the perfect title . . ."

"Ah—give it the air!" she advised with weary acidity. "*The Image in the Heart*. I know. Change your lines, Guv'nor. You're getting as stale as last week's bread. And now the *Image* is off your chest, what about that play by your new man—Foster?"

Her tone was harsh, and he looked at her with veiled anger. But he had no wish to quarrel with her beyond the danger point. Once he had been in love with her; was so no longer. Still, though her sex appeal had waned he was passionately devoted to her box office appeal. From that angle she was

tremendously valuable. So, truthfully, patiently, he explained:

"*Bedrock* isn't your type of play. You are an actress of temperament, fire. You rouse the lawless instincts of man. And the woman-lead in this play is . . ."

"Sweetie-sweetie Cinderella stuff?" she mocked. "Saves the hero, pays off the mortgage, and stays chemically pure until the bitter end . . . ?"

"Something like it," he admitted, suppressing a smile. Rita had her amusing moments. "At all events—I repeat—not at all your type."

"But the type for — what's her name — Cameron?"

"Precisely."

"Who is she? Sweet sixteen, I suppose? Won a beauty contest in Charleston, S. C.? Complete lady? All rosebud lips and burning blushes and scared of her own shadow?"

Cardoza grew more irritated. He was silent, his fingers drumming on the desk.

"Who is she?" Rita insisted.

"None of your business!" Then—for he considered it good policy to make Rita jealous—his tone softened, his eyes looked past hers, dreamy, a little fatuous. "She is like a lily—like dewdrops on a lily . . ."

"Boloney!" was Rita's crude comment.

He went white with rage while she, ignoring the danger signal, continued warningly:

"Know what I'll do if you don't get me a play—and a good one for a change—and P. D. Q.?"

"Well . . . ?"

"I'll quit—cold—two months from today—the moment my contract is over."

He drew a long breath of wounded vanity and astonishment. His egotism had never permitted him to see that people might be through with him. He could be through with them. But the shoe must never be on the other foot. He could not afford to lose her. That he knew. Equally, because of his stubborn pride, he could not afford to give in to her.

"What do I care?" he cried. "And—who would hire you? What are you without me? I made you. I taught you—every gesture, every intonation, every single emotion. You are my creation!"

"I am, like hell!"

"You are! You do not believe your own denial. Without me you'll be like a rudderless ship . . . you'll founder, wreck, sink . . . and some day you'll crawl to me—what's left of you . . . yes, on your hands and knees you'll crawl—begging me to take you back!"

She grew pale under her make-up. They were

both of them furious to insanity, striking out blindly, one trying to hurt the other.

He had succeeded. Now it was her turn.

"Crawl back—to you?" she sneered, her lips twisted. "Crawl back to a rotten old has-been? I? With my talent? With half a dozen better men than you offering me fat contracts?" Her voice rose to a shriek. "Laugh that off! You know it's true, you damned old back-number!"

He reached out a hand; encountered a small jade bottle filled with pungent smelling-salts; lifted it to his quivering nostrils.

"How dare you?" he gasped, his heart pounding the blood into his brain. "How dare you—you—you guttersnipe . . . ?"

"Sure. I came up from the gutter—and you'll wind up there! I'm not the only one who thinks you're done for. Look at the newspapers—look at the critics—they're wise kids—*they* know! Say! Wizard of Broadway—are you? Fake of Broadway is more like it. Your act is played out—curtain's ready to ring down . . . and I know which side my bun is buttered on. The new people, the people with ideas, with real artistic sense—they are the comers—the Playgoers' Guild . . . they're the real thing . . . and they're the dock I'll tie up to, Guv'nor!"

She came a step nearer the desk, leaned forward,

and thrust her mocking, exotic little face within an inch of his own.

"Make the most of the Cameron skirt," she advised him. "For someone'll have to take my place in your dump . . . and get wise to yourself, old dear! You're on the downgrade—and you're slipping fast, you rotten old Kike!"

Before he could reply, she had turned on her heel and swung out of the studio, leaving him gaping for breath, shaking with rage.

She, too, trembled; with reaction. Walking down Broadway, she wondered if she had been—a little hasty?

After all, her contract with the Guv'nor had still two months to run, and she had no guarantee save her own vanity that the Playgoers' Guild would sign her.

Well—what of it? Her red mouth straightened to a mutinous line. She was young, gifted, almost famous. A Cardoza star! And she'd show this same Cardoza that he couldn't drive her on a curb . . . oh no . . .

"Rita!" she heard a voice. A stocky man with smiling, malicious eyes, had caught up with her near the Astor. "When did you get back?"

"Why—Roy Hartley—by all that's unholy!"

They shook hands. He was a newspaper columnist who knew everyone on Broadway, a walking

Blue Book of the Roaring Forties, a living encyclopedia of all the gossip, scandal, dirt, and low-down between Thirty-Fourth Street and Columbus Circle. He and Rita were good friends—perhaps because they knew too much about each other to be enemies.

They stood there a moment, talking idly. But in Rita's shrewd, vindictive little brain a plan was forming dimly. She seized Hartley by the arm and dragged him into the hotel lobby.

"Sit down a moment."

"It's too late for lunch and too early for dinner," he protested, "and besides I've a heavy date."

"Be yourself! I won't put any strain on your wallet. Listen! Who's this Robert Foster—the Guv'nor's latest catch amongst the poor suckers called playwrights? Know him?"

"Sure," came Hartley's slightly hurt reply. Wasn't Rita aware that he knew everyone?

"What's he like?"

"Oh—he's a nice kid."

"I want to meet him."

"He isn't your sort. Didn't you hear me say he's a nice kid?"

"Cut out the comic-strip stuff. I want to meet him—and as soon as possible."

"Why the rush?" He stared at her, his small eyes

inquisitive and twinkling. "Had a row with the Guv'nor?"

"Of course not."

"Then why . . . ?"

"Curiosity—nothing but. You've got plenty and you gratify it. Why pick on me?"

Two large ladies from Bayonne, N. J., passed through the lobby, and one, clutching her friend's perspiring, chiffoned arm, squealed excitedly:

"Oh—there's Rita Andrews—in the red chair . . . don't she look just like she does on the stage?"

Hartley grinned, overhearing, as Rita, also overhearing, looked up and bestowed a sweet, absent-minded smile upon her admirer—since, after all, the feminine matinée audience spells the difference between failure and success—and frowned a moment later as the other woman walked on, saying in a piercing whisper:

"Oh—I don't know, Florabelle. She looks older. These actresses lead a pretty swift life . . ."

"Take that!" laughed Hartley.

"Old frump!" came Rita's comment, loud enough to strike the New Jersey ear. "If Eve had been like her, Adam would never have tasted the well-known apple. Well—what about the Foster lad?"

"Tell you what I'll do. I'll toss a party—late tomorrow night after the theatre, and ask him over

to the house. I'll give you a ring. O. K., sweetheart?"

"You're a good egg, Roy," she smiled. "Some day when I'm tired of—what did she call it?—oh yes—the pretty swift life—I'll marry you."

"Not if I see you first, dearie," returned the columnist, with more honesty than gallantry. "Well—I must ankle along . . . 'by . . ."

But he did not go far. He was the sort of person whom possible gossip itches without relief until he has pinned it down and put it in wary, slurring type right next to the editorial page; and so he turned into a United Cigar store and looked up Robert Foster in the telephone book.

The playwright lived just around the corner, Hartley discovered. Eventually, why not now? he asked himself; and trotted over to Foster's small apartment hotel and made inquiries.

Yes—Mr. Foster was in. Yes—Mr. Foster would see Mr. Hartley.

While the wheezing elevator conveyed this Samuel Pepys of the Great White Way to the seventh floor, Foster was waiting, wondering, definitely flattered at the impending visit. He knew Hartley very slightly. It seemed to him the first seal of Broadway approval, the first whiff of Broadway incense rising sweetly to his nostrils.

The other came in, beaming.

"Sorry to crash in on you like this," he said. "But—" he lied pleasantly— "I've been meaning to look you up for some time . . . and was just passing by. No time like the present, eh?"

"I'm glad you came, Hartley. Cigarette?"

"Thanks. Talked about you to Lysander Cotton only the other night. He's all for you. Guess he'll forget his enmity against the Guv'nor and give your play a good write-up when it's produced."

"I hope so."

"You've certainly made the grade. But—why do you keep yourself to yourself? Why don't you get out and breathe some carbon monoxide now and then? I never run across you."

"I've been terribly busy."

"With the Guv'nor—rewriting your opera line for line?"

"Well—yes."

"He works all his little boys to death. But—all work and no play—you know the rest. I'm throwing an after-the-show party at my place tomorrow night. Why not step in? Some of the gang'll be there . . . they're all crazy to meet you. Will you come?"

"Glad to," Foster told him—and meant it.

"How are you getting on with the Guv'nor?" The voice was more casual than the intent, since all was grist which came to his column's mill.

"Splendidly. Of course."

"No 'of course' about it—though I'm tickled to hear you say so. By the way, what's the new girl like—Sally Cameron? He sure keeps her under cover. Pretty?"

"Very," Foster replied with a stiffness which did not escape the older man.

"Just out of the Kindergarten, I guess?"

"She's quite young," said the other reluctantly, hating to discuss Sally.

"That's what the Guv'nor likes. Unripe fruit. Say—slip me the low-down—has the old boy tried to make her yet?"

Foster was furious.

"I don't know what you mean!" he exclaimed.

Hartley lifted an eyebrow. So that's how the land lay? he thought; and continued soothingly:

"Keep your shirt on, feller! No harm meant. Only—you know what the Guv'nor is like. He *does* try to make 'em all. Part of his dramatic instruction, I suppose . . ."

"Look here," interrupted the playwright, with sullen resentment, "I want you to understand that Sally Cameron's the finest, cleanest girl who ever came to Broadway!"

"But—the question is—will she be the finest, cleanest girl when she leaves Broadway? What's the matter with you, Foster? You can't be as innocent

as all that—even if you are from the wild and woolly West! They've got petting parties out there, too, haven't they . . . and short skirts—and . . ." He laughed; repeated: "You *can't* be as innocent as all that!"

"Innocent—hell! But it's a damned shame that every girl who has looks and talent and tries to get ahead in the theatre should be open to this rotten gossip. Why—speaking about the wild and woolly West—if anybody out there should make such remarks . . ."

"Ride 'em, cowboy! Don't shoot! I eat my words!" He rose; held out a hand: "Forgotten and forgiven?"

Foster, his anger over, smiled amiably enough.

"You bet!"

"Good. Well—I must toddle along. I'll try and toss a sobbing party in your honor tomorrow night. My bootlegger is an honest soul. He got religion the last time he went to the hoosegow and wouldn't poison his clients even at a fixed price."

He left, and Foster went back to his desk.

For the time being his work with Cardoza was at a standstill, since the remainder of the rewriting would be done during rehearsal. He was now busy with the first draft of his new play, his New York play. But his work did not go well. After dinner, he found himself restless and uneasy. Of course—

he thought—there was nothing in what Hartley had said. The man didn't improve on acquaintance —he was shallow and a little affectedly absurd with his bright, inquisitive eyes and his magpie ways . . . and his gossip . . .

Damn Broadway, anyway! It tarnished everyone who came into close contact with it . . .

No, no! There was nothing in Hartley's slurring remarks. A man as well known as the Guv'nor was bound to be gossiped about. The old outworn, but persistent stuff about managers and their stars , . . nothing but a lot of blah . . . and yet, he was forced to admit to himself, disturbing. Very disturbing. He couldn't get on with his work tonight. He must see Sally; must talk to her, rid his mind of this uneasiness, these vague, unpleasant suspicions.

He jumped into a taxi and, twenty minutes later, arrived at her apartment.

Emily Garrod, the Cardoza ex-secretary, opened the door. She told him, rather reluctantly, that Miss Cameron was in . . .

"But she's tired, resting. I don't think she can see you."

"Tell her I'm here," he insisted. "I want to talk to her—about the play. Ask her to give me half an hour."

Emily hesitated. But Sally, who had recognized

Foster's voice, came running, wholly unfatigued to judge by her looks and perfectly cordial.

"Bob—how nice—do come in!"

Emily shrugged her thin shoulders. She disappeared into her bedroom, leaving the door ajar. This was not the first time she had chaperoned one of the Guv'nor's youthful stars; nor—she reflected sourly—the first time the Guv'nor had had a younger rival. And she picked up a book, but without reading it, while Sally and Foster sat down in the small, well furnished living room, the windows open to the hot summer night.

She looked, he thought, very lovely in her leaf-green frock. He told her so; and she flushed—a very little.

"How's *Bedrock* going, Bob?"

"Right enough. Only—" ruefully— "I never realized that a play is not written—but rewritten."

"Lots of changes?"

"Oodles. Chiefly in your part. And I'm not sure I like them all."

"But—Bob—" loyally— "the Guv'nor knows best."

"I guess so. Gosh—" with boyish enthusiasm— "I hope it'll be a wow of a hit. Then we're made —you and I, Sally—together—and then . . ."

He hesitated. He touched her hand, took it in his; and Emily's sharp eyes, peering through the

slant of the door, observed; observed, too, that Sally withdrew her fingers.

"Bob," Sally reminded him hastily, "remember our bargain. We must be free!"

"Nothing in our bargain against hoping—and dreaming, is there?"

"I thought you came to talk about the play? I'll get it. There's a line that puzzles me."

She jumped up, a little agitated, her breath coming just a little faster, and brought back the typewritten pages.

Foster's half hour stretched out to an hour, two hours.

They discussed Sally's part. They discussed the whole play. It was the first time they had had this opportunity, to talk everything over—alone. And so, eventually, they talked about themselves and their futures; talked so youthfully and thus, in a measure, so selfishly, with a hint of swagger, a hint of brag. Oh yes—there was no doubt of it—they would take the gaudy bubble of Broadway in their strong, young hands; would transform it into a globe of pure gold through the alchemy of the gifts, the beliefs, the ideals the good Lord God had given them.

"We'll make it, Bob!"

"You bet your life we'll make it!"

At last he left. He had forgotten all the jealousy

and distaste and suspicions aroused in him by Roy Hartley's random, malicious gossip. They had evaporated as fog in the sunlight, and he was in a warm, golden glow of happiness as he entered the down-stairs lobby. Sally was—Sally. The most wonderful girl in the world. And it was in this mood that, walking toward the street door, he recognised the short, broad-shouldered figure, black-clad, priestly, which approached on small, short-stepping feet.

The Guv'nor!

The Guv'nor—calling on Sally at—what time? —he consulted his wrist watch—half past ten at night!

On the instant, all his suspicions returned with an ugly, gray rush.

He stopped still and did not advance another pace. He waited, his hands thrust in his pockets, for the other, preoccupied man to come up to him.

CHAPTER NINE

FOR once Cardoza was without his faithful shadow, Jack Griggs. On a rebound, a reaction from his ugly scene with Rita Andrews, he had made up his tortuous, secretive mind that he must see Sally Cameron; not in the studio where they might be disturbed, but alone.

There were two reasons why this demand was urgent within him.

One was quite personal and purely emotional. Rita had rasped his nerves raw, had deeply wounded his vanity. Rita was hard and untender and mocking. And Sally . . . ? Sally was all youth, warm and radiant and pliant . . . these things he needed to restore him to himself. The soft, admiring eyes, the naïve adulation . . . he must have them, to salve his wounds and to give him back his strength and self-esteem.

But the second reason was perfectly businesslike, based on plain, rocky common sense. For suppose Rita made good her threat and quit him? Someone, as she had jeeringly suggested, must take her

place. That someone might be Sally. She was a good little actress. But—*how* good was she? Had he, perhaps, overestimated her because of her attraction for him? Would she eventually be able to replace Rita in talent, in popularity, in box office appeal? He must find out; must see her, therefore, at once, take her by surprise, sort out her gifts. He must reconvince himself.

With these thoughts racing through his brain he walked into Foster—almost literally.

"Hello, Guv'nor," the playwright greeted him with an elaborate carelessness, not even bothering to smile.

Cardoza started; looked up; stepped back a pace. In an instant his whole humor changed. Foster, eh? Had evidently called on Sally . . .

Why?

He stared at the younger man with dark, tormented eyes, recalling, quickly, furiously, the whispers he had overheard between the two at his birthday party. Not the words. He had heard no words. But the tone, the engrossed look of them both. If —if they were making a fool of him behind his back—using him for their own purpose—if Sally were interested in Foster—if she had tacitly lied to her employer . . . ?

Suddenly, belligerently, he demanded:

"What's the idea, Bob?"

"What do you mean?" asked the other, aggressive in his turn.

"Been to see Miss Cameron, haven't you?"

"Yes," admitted Foster, a trifle astonished at the direct attack.

"Why?" barked the Guv'nor.

It was on the tip of Foster's tongue to bark back, brusquely, as he felt:

"None of your damned business!"

But he controlled himself—from two motives.

One was purely selfish. His play meant so much to him; it meant his future. He could not afford to quarrel with Cardoza.

The other motive, the really driving one, unselfish in its inception if love is ever that, was because through no word or action of his did he wish to injure Sally.

So he replied with a lie which was not entirely a lie:

"I just dropped by in passing—to talk over the play with her."

But the explanation did not serve any good. On the contrary, it did harm.

For if the producer was congenitally jealous of all men, chiefly of all younger men, where his emotions and desires were concerned or threatened, he was even more jealous in his artistic, professional capacity. In his theatre, with his actors and ac-

tresses, in every play under his banner, he was the supreme master, the dictator from whose judgment there was no appeal. Shakespeare may have written the play, Goethe, Sophocles; but Leo Cardoza's name, and his alone, always, enormously, challengingly, topped the billboards, the newspaper advertisements, the four-sheets, the programs, the electric signs hiccoughing through the Broadway night with crimson and green and mandarin-yellow.

Therefore he exclaimed angrily:

"You've got your gall!"

"Eh?"

"By what right dare you interfere—in *my* play?"

Foster paled. That little personal pronoun was big enough to upset any applecart and spill any kettle of beans.

"How do you get that way?" he countered, a trifle dangerously. "Don't you mean—*my* play?"

"One hell of a chance any play of *yours* would have—if I did not infuse it with the vital spark—if . . ."

"All right. Let's tear up the contract."

"I will—damn you . . . I . . ."

Suddenly Cardoza was silent. In the space of a quickened heartbeat he reflected that it was not the time—not yet the time—to quarrel with Foster. *Bedrock* was good. The cast had been partly engaged, some of the scenery bought, the try-out

theatres contracted for. Besides, there was no other promising play in his safe. Later on, he thought swiftly, when he would hold all the aces and a joker, he could force a showdown if necessary. But not yet.

So he smiled, and all his potent charm and magnetism flashed in that gesture toward friendliness. He put a hand on Foster's arm as if for support; said in a weary, deprecating tone:

"I was hasty. I exaggerated. I—ah—I've a touch of my neuralgia again. Overwork, I guess. Makes me jumpy, irritable. Forgive me, my boy."

"That's all right," murmured the other, who was slow to get into a rage, and slow to make up. Too, he was a little embarrassed—for the Guv'nor. Somehow, the apology had seemed to cheapen the latter more than his fit of temper. Still—he *had* apologized; and he *was* the Guv'nor. "You—you sort of got under my skin."

"But—you have pardoned me?" Then, as Foster nodded, Cardoza went on: "Thank you, Bob. And, as to the play, it is yours, entirely yours. It'll be a great success. And it's your play I came here to discuss with Miss Sally. God bless you, my boy!"

So they parted, friendly enough to all appearance, yet each conscious of the first important rift in their mutual harmony, each rather bitter, each with his suspicions unlulled.

Rapidly, in the elevator, the producer thought over the little scene which had just passed.

If, as he suspected, Foster's affections were involved and, possibly, Sally's, then it was quite on the cards that Foster had spoken to her of love . . . and this only a few minutes earlier. Were this the case it was no time for Cardoza himself to become personal, not even in the most delicate manner. But—he might do something to disaffect her with Foster, he thought, smiling a little as the door opened to his ring.

"How are you, Emily? Miss Sally still up?"

"Yes." Emily regarded her employer with some slight, hidden malice which was her secret protest at the way in which she earned her living. "She had a caller . . ."

"I know. Mr. Foster. I met him downstairs," Cardoza said, expressionless, and walked past the woman into the living room.

Sally, who had been standing at the open window, misty-eyed, thinking of Robert Foster, turned with a start as she heard Cardoza's light words:

"Dreaming of curtain calls, child?"

She went toward him, her hands outstretched, her face illuminated with genuine pleasure.

"Why, Guv'nor . . . how awfully nice of you!"

Surely, he thought, that welcome was real enough. Yes . . . the glow in her eyes—the smile

that curled her red lips . . . perhaps, after all, she had no emotional interest in Foster.

"I missed you," he told her, "and so came on down for a little chat . . ."

"Why didn't you send for me? I could have taken a taxi."

"No. I've worked you hard enough. You must be tired, and rehearsals start so soon. All that has gone before has been child's play—compared to rehearsals," he said truthfully. "I warn you, once I get my people together and start in, I'm a slave driver."

"You won't be a slave driver tonight, will you?" she jested. "No, no. I came to see you—oh—quietly. You are so restful. I met Foster going out," he added, suddenly, as if casually.

She lifted serene eyes to his own black, sharply observing glance.

"Yes—we talked about the play . . ."

"I see . . ."

"There was one line . . . I didn't quite understand his interpretation of it . . ."

"Suppose you consult *me?*" he suggested smiling.

She got out the script again and pointed to the disputed line with a slender, white finger.

"Here . . . I—I don't think his psychology is quite right," she confessed ingenuously, not feeling disloyal to Foster. For, after all, she was only trying to improve, not to harm the play by her anxiety

to have every word perfect. "I don't think that a woman—not the girl in the play, anyway—would say that."

"What do you think is wrong with the speech?"

"Everything. She says: '*You can't love a man with all your soul and not know him absolutely. You can't have lived for a year with the thought of one man in your heart, and not be aware of the slightest change in him . . .*' And then she goes on that, if 'Lester' were guilty of her father's accusations, she'd have known it instinctively."

"Well . . . ?"

"In the first place the girl is supposed to be inarticulate. She doesn't analyze. She'd show that she believes him, without going into details. And in the second place she's—oh—wrong. You can't know anyone absolutely, whether you love him or not," she explained earnestly, "and loving a man isn't a guarantee of his innocence in any given situation."

"Where did you learn so much wisdom?"

"I guess it comes natural," she laughed.

But he did not join in her laughter. For his great idea, rather the moment for his great idea, had come to him.

He leaned back; looked at her; spoke slowly:

"You must not joke about your own gifts—your great gifts—the fine texture of your brain and soul. . . ."

"Oh—Guv'nor!" She was embarrassed—and pleased.

"I mean it. This part—" tapping the typewritten pages— "you'll do it superb justice. I'm glad I didn't listen to Bob. The girl he wanted could never have been one half as good as you."

"The girl—he wanted?" she echoed.

Cardoza saw her go white; and he wondered: jealousy of this non-existent girl as an actress . . . or personal jealousy, emotional jealousy, because of Foster?

He kept his anger and doubt from his face and voice and continued smoothly:

"Yes. The first day he came to me he had a girl in mind. Some actress he'd known. I'd seen her once or twice. Quite talented. And pretty. Really very pretty. But—she hasn't the real flame, Sally. I think I've convinced Bob that my choice was the wiser. I'm a tough old war horse. I'm not carried away so easily . . . but you know how it is with these young playwrights—can't blame them . . . with all the flattery they get from actresses . . ."

"I guess so," said Sally dully.

The monkey-wrench thrown, Cardoza went on to discuss the play with her. He would himself rewrite the line which bothered her. She must always come to him with whatever bothered her.

"Not only in connection with this play, Sally.

But—oh—in anything else. Whatever bothers you, worries you. You understand, Sally? I'm your very good friend."

"Thank you, Guv'nor."

So, shortly afterwards, he took his departure, while she went to bed.

But she did not sleep. She tossed on her tumbled pillows.

Another girl—after their talk in Central Park the very night of the play's acceptance?

Another girl?

She believed Cardoza. She had no reason to doubt him. And she was disappointed in Foster.

Of course he had been in New York several years; had written one-acters for the vaudeville circuits; must have met lots of actresses before he had met Sally; must have mentioned one of them to the Guv'nor.

All right, so far. Why not? Other girls, too, had talent and ambition.

But why had he led her to believe, that night in the Park, that she was his only choice for the part?

She fought back her anger. For—and this was her finest virtue—she was fair-minded. She said to herself that she wanted her career, wanted it with her whole palpitating heart and soul. So, she supposed, did Bob want his. Therefore he had a perfect right to choose—to try and choose—whatever

actress he imagined would do the utmost justice to *Bedrock.*

On the other hand, he loved her. He had said so.

How, loving her, could he have wished another actress to ride to fame on the crest of his drama? And even—supposing his success meant more to him than his love—yes—even so—why had he not owned up to it frankly? Why had he not told her the truth?

Perhaps he had not wished to hurt her feelings?

"Well—" she decided— "better to hurt my feelings—with truth, with honesty—than to do what he did: to have me find out, accidentally, from the Guv'nor."

So, finally, she fell asleep. But misunderstanding remained, suspicion, jealousy. Misunderstanding, suspicion, jealousy—Broadway's ugly trinity, rearing its snaky head.

All the next day she thought of it. It disturbed her terribly; and it was quite late in the evening when, rather against her better judgment, she telephoned to Foster. She would ask him to come over, and they'd talk it out.

Not that she mentioned the "talking out" part over the wires. All she said was:

"Can you come over tonight?"

"I'd love to. But I can't . . ."

"Oh . . . ?"

"Roy Hartley—the columnist, you know—is throwing a party."

"I see. Well—some other evening. Have a good time." And, hanging up the receiver, she sat down and pondered.

Party at Roy Hartley's. Perhaps, she thought miserably, that other girl—whoever she was—would be there.

And again, hurt, disappointed, she went to bed, was again unable to sleep, while Robert Foster arrived bright and early—if late in the evening—at Hartley's amazingly overfurnished downtown apartment.

Almost everybody who was anybody—on Broadway, where nobody doubted that he was somebody—was there in roaring full force: talking, laughing, drinking, flirting, gossiping; making and unmaking reputations good or bad; backbiting and cheek-kissing; flattering, boasting, bragging; saying things they hoped would be thought brilliant and quoted—with due credit given—or be thought profound and meditated over; wise-cracking and reminiscing, since both were their stock-in-trade; acting off stage as much as on; trying to impress one another since there was no audience to impress; Sacrificing their best friends for the sake of a *bon mot;* stealing each other's pet "stuff" and "lines"; dramatizing the lighting of a match or the

raising of a high-ball glass; walking on Persian rugs and lolling on overstuffed sofas and regarding their host's amazing collection of furniture with a composite, sardonic eye.

For gossip had it that the furniture, like most of the guests, had been on the stage and that Hartley had begged, borrowed, or bullied it from various theatrical producers with promise of repayment through sundry "good publicity" newspaper items.

Hartley met Foster at the door and introduced him impressively.

"Boys and girls," he cried, waving his pudgy hands, "meet Bob Foster, a damned good scout and the Guv'nor's latest find! Meet your rising young playwright in the flesh! Lines form on the left—and don't all beg for a play at once! Give him air —but not *the* air!"

At that there was more or less of a concerted rush, and Foster found himself the center of a dozen or so men and women. Famous, most of them; people whose names twinkled electrically above theatre entrances. He remembered how, only a few months earlier, in the hope of selling his play, he had written to several of them; had received never a reply. Foster? Unknown. Now he was Foster known; and he was "dear boy" and "dear lad" and "dear old trout" and presently "Bob."

He was glad when Lysander Cotton, the dramatic critic, came to his rescue.

"Have a drink, Bob?"

The actors fell away.

Lysander Cotton! The Guv'nor could make players. But Cotton could unmake them.

"Having a good time?" he asked.

"Well—" smiled Foster— "looks as if all the cream of Broadway were here."

"Cream slightly soured," replied the critic. "Give an actor enough rope and he'll think he's Will Rogers. Hey—" he added hastily— "don't you swipe that line for your next play! I'm going to use it myself."

The playwright laughed; then said:

"Isn't that Rita Andrews over there?"

"The same. In person. Want to meet her?"

"Sure."

"Well—come along, Bob. But don't tell me afterwards that I didn't warn you."

CHAPTER TEN

RITA ANDREWS had established herself in the corner of a couch and was holding it against all comers. She had not joined in the rush forward to meet Foster. Sooner or later Roy Hartley or someone else would bring him to her—which was as it should be.

She greeted him now, and he sat down beside her, while Cotton muttered: "Reversed Miss Muffet," and drifted away to listen to the comments and clawings of the other guests.

"I know this chair," exclaimed Arbuckle Jones, the low comedian, as he sank his bulk into crimson upholstery, "and well do I know it! I sat in this damned thing for most of the second act in that comedy—forget the name—by Arthur Richman. Jees'—what a play! People out front laughed so loud you could hear 'em to the Battery. Not Arthur's fault either . . . I used my own gags . . . and the notices I got! Gosh. . . ."

"I saw you," growled his best friend, a tall and melancholy-looking Englishman whose slightest

gesture was a signal for mirth among audiences. "You were lousy in it, dear old cherub! Come on —heave yourself out of that underdone chaise longue and let's lap up some bootleg."

"This is the table," commented Mrs. O'Hara Frisby, the tragedienne, "behind which I played the great emotional scene in *Boston*. Even the stage hands wept . . ."

Lysander Cotton, overhearing, almost wept, too; and around Mrs. Frisby a bevy of young *ingénues,* who felt that she had still something to teach and was too old by now to menace them, "Oh'd" and "Ah'd" with admiration and pursed their little mouths—decorated in any of the prevailing colors: dawn-orange, raspberry red, geranium, crimson rambler, or sunset glow.

She held forth grandiosely, while Mr. O'Hara Frisby looked on and whispered glumly, in a stage aside:

"My bitter half!"

Drinks circulated. So did the drinkers. Tongues became loosened — unnecessarily, being loose enough to start with. George Merwin, the Tin-Pan Alley king, sat down at the piano.

"My latest!" he announced. "I call it a Czechoslovak love song!"

And, in a high, cracked voice, he improvised:

"She blew her nose and gave her name away-ay-ay . . ."

Laughter. Applause.

Broadway's children were having a glorious time. Spoiled and selfish children, quarreling over a sugarplum, forming violent friendships, sudden dislikes, alliances and *mésalliances,* all in the space of a few crowded hours. Everybody here was on the make. Everybody was trying to squeeze something, in sensation or admiration or envy, from everybody else. It was all in baroque, grotesque contrast—with itself and with facts, with life. It was all strident and garish. It was all stucco and tinsel and spangles. It was all "props." And ever the gilded ball of scandal and repartee was tossed up, caught, tossed again . . .

"Say—Carl Van Dusen has taken an apartment in Harlem . . ."

"Well—love is blind."

"Evidently color-blind!"

"Hear the latest?"

"Yes . . . ?"

"Florrie Collier's got herself another divorce."

"Reno ought to give her a wholesale discount."

"I'm for her. It's divorce that keeps the women in circulation."

"What were her grounds this time?"

"Extreme cruelty on Pat's part?"

"No. Extreme ukelele."

"I told Pat when he married her he'd never be able to hold her love."

"There are only two ways of holding a woman's love. One is to lie to her . . ."

"And so's the other."

"Seen anything lately of Carlotta San Diego?"

"No. She goes nowhere these days. Has a new lover . . ."

"Who's the poor bloody fool?"

"Ralph Huston . . ."

"Why—isn't he . . . ?"

"Her divorced husband! Sure!"

"That's what I like about Carlotta. She's so straitlaced even in her infidelities," chimed in Roy Hartley.

He was wandering among his guests, his sharp ears cocked, picking up crumbs of gossip for his column. But he was especially interested in what Rita Andrews and Robert Foster might have to offer and so, unostentatiously, kept near them.

A black-haired girl with a Madonna coiffure and the lips of a Borgia leaned over Rita, her dimpled elbow on the back of the sofa. She looked softly at Foster during the casual presentation; asked Rita gently:

"Have you a new play, darling?"

"Not yet." Rita smiled. The Madonna girl was a

Cardoza also-ran who had lasted less than a season. "The Guv'nor is taking his time. He doesn't want to risk anything but a certain success."

"No—not again, I suppose," answered her loving friend; then cooed at Foster: "Why don't you write a play for *me?*"

"Oh—" he replied, not knowing what else to say—"I'll be glad to—some time."

"Drop in on me any night. I'm at the Shelton. I've a wonderful idea for a drawing-room comedy . . ."

"Bedroom comedy more likely," commented Rita, "and she'll play the lead—on and off . . ."

Others came up, drifted away, men and women, stars and would-be stars. All eager. A playwright! A playwright with the bloom still on him; not yet hard-boiled to advances—male or female! Their lawful prey!

"Carolina mountain play—that's what Broadway wants—and you can do it, Bob!" said Stanley Whitemere, who referred to himself as an F. F. V., a member of one of the First Families of Virginia, though other actors interpreted it as the "Fighting Fairies of Virginia." "My last play was a flop. Why—there wasn't a single 'son-of-a-bitch' in the whole three acts!"

"Going in vaudeville," boomed Arbuckle Jones genially, a high-ball glass in his hand. "Why don't

you write a sketch for me, Bob? Something that'll knock 'em for a row of Peruvian cuspidors! Comic as hell—but class . . . get what I mean . . . ? Class—no pie throwing . . ."

"My dear young friend," said Mrs. O'Hara Frisby in her deep, throbbing voice, "you can write tragedies . . ."

"Oh no—I can't," he stammered.

"Oh yes—you can . . . for *me!*" She stared at him so that, almost, he quailed.

"But . . ."

"I can see it in your eyes. You will write me a tragedy about the Dowager Empress of China. At the end of the third act I shall commit suicide . . ."

"Three acts too late!" whispered her husband, while she continued:

"Come to tea tomorrow, Mr. Foster!"

It sounded like a royal command; and she turned away, while Rita commented lazily:

"Like a lot of ravenous wolves, aren't they? You know—in spite of all their conceit they realize darned well that they'd be ribbon counter clerks and manicure girls—without the pen-pushing tribe."

He looked at her admiringly. She was in great beauty tonight; her small, oval face resembling an eighteenth century miniature; her dress, audaci-

ously low-cut, like moonbeams on rippling, silken water and molded to her uncorseted figure.

"Not a thing under it," a watchful female hissed at her current best friend.

"She's right," laughed Rita.

She was perfectly at ease, holding Foster there by her side, captive of her bow and spear for all Broadway to see and envy; presenting him to newcomers who drifted up; commenting lightly, wittily, on everyone.

Foster was happy. He was having the time of his life. He felt that he was—somebody. Almost the man of the hour. He liked it. He liked it a lot. Why not? He was young, healthy, normal, ambitious.

Presently the rugs were rolled up, George Merwin sat at the piano, thumping the keys, there was dancing; and Rita Andrews, still secure in her corner, shaking her head to all invitations to Black-Bottom or Charleston, demanded suddenly:

"What sort of play did you write for the Guv'nor?"

"Western play. The struggle of a self-made millionaire . . . there's a daughter . . . oh . . . I can't explain—" he said, very self-conscious . . . "it's a hard sort of thing . . . basic emotions—no romantic frills . . ."

"I see," said Rita slowly; and then proceeded,

delicately, to put several hopping little fleas in Foster's nice, flat-to-the-head ear.

She lit a cigarette; asked:

"The Guv'nor collaborating with you, is he?"

"Yes. I couldn't do without him," Foster said loyally—and believed it at the moment. For this was Cardoza's world, the world of Broadway, and Cardoza's glamor over it, puissant if vicarious. This was not the lobby of Sally Cameron's apartment house.

" 'Couldn't do without him,' " mimicked Rita. "That's what they all say."

"Oh. . . ."

"He'll cop off half your royalties . . ."

"Oh—money . . . I don't begrudge . . ."

"Sure you don't. Only—take a tip from me, brother—pretty soon he'll call it *his* play . . ." She slurred; stopped; went on: "That is, if he hasn't already, eh?"

Foster was disturbed.

"*His*" play. Rita Andrews was right . . . in spite of Cardoza's apology. Still, his admiration and gratitude of the past few weeks were not to be overthrown so easily. Shaken, perhaps. But not overthrown.

"The Guv'nor's all right," he said. "He's a corker."

"Granted—in homeopathic doses—like" she

made a wry face, "castor oil. But too much is too much. I'm not trying to cast any asparagus on him," she fabricated smoothly. "Only—I've known him longer than you have, and it's only friendly advice to say: Watch your step. Lots of other people would slip you the same tip if they had the chance or the nerve . . . people in his office, I mean . . . but he has them sewed up tight. All of them. Old Ben Levi. Griggs. Powers. And—Healy . . ."

She laughed a little, frowned, while Foster, who had never either outgrown or satisfied his curiosity concerning the tall Irishwoman, looked up, interestedly. Here was a chance to find out something about her.

"I've seen a lot of her," he said, "and I don't feel that I'd ever get to know her."

"Nobody does. Not even the Guv'nor."

"And you—" he questioned further.

"I? Oh—she and I don't like each other," Rita said, reflectively, but found it more discreet not to explain further as she observed the playwright's inquiring expression. She added: "But Healy's clever —make no mistake about it . . . and she's got a lot of inside pull. You've heard of these men behind the throne, haven't you, kingmakers, makers of presidents? Well—I guess she's one of them—"

"Sort of White House Spokesman . . . ?"

"Except that she never speaks much. By the way

—how come your leading lady, Miss Cameron, isn't here?"

"Hartley doesn't know her . . ."

"Is it possible? She ought to be put in a side show —with the rest of the freaks. But you might have brought her without Roy issuing a special invitation. Or don't you know her either?"

"Of course I do. But—well—anyway—her contract forbids her to . . ."

"Naturally!" interrupted Rita. She laughed—low, delicious laughter—her round throat quivering, her large silver-loop earrings swinging to and fro. "I'd almost forgotten clause eighteen. I used to obey the letter of that law myself. And, for a little while, the spirit. Well—she'll get over it in time. Is it true that the Guv'nor spends most of his evenings at her apartment?"

"I don't know about that," came the stiff, troubled rejoinder. "Still—" eager to protect Sally against all comers—"he has started rehearsing her . . ."

Rita's laughter was harsh now, shrill.

"Giving her private lessons in elocution," she jeered. "That's what he calls it! Gee—he's an amazing old bimbo . . . he's been getting away with that identical, sobbing line of blah for at least seven hundred years . . ."

She watched the playwright's face narrowly.

Her earlier remark—"or don't you know her either?"—had been a mere vocal gesture, since Roy Hartley had told her that Foster and Sally Cameron were friends, had expanded: "He's crazy-nuts about the kid. I passed some smart-cracks—you know, the usual stuff—new actress, same old Guv'nor—and the lad went up in the air a mile."

Before Foster, therefore, had time to reply, she rose and left him, smiling over her shoulder:

"See you anon."

For she was a clever psychologist in her way, and she figured that she had done enough preliminary damage. "Let him stew in his own juice for a while," she thought, "and by-and-by he'll be ready to talk turkey."

So she drifted through the crowd and presently, her arrogant, dark head close to his sleek, butter-colored cranium, was dancing beautifully with the latest juvenile imported from London, while Arbuckle Jones commented:

"Juvenile? My eye! Every damned one of 'em is old enough to be my grandfather!"

He grumbled; swore.

"Feeling bad?" asked the Madonna girl.

"Rotten. My own fault."

"Oh. . . ?"

"Sure. I *can't* sleep. I *don't* eat. And I *will* drink."

Laughter—in which Foster, who, too, had risen, joined, a little mechanically.

He was troubled. Why had Rita Andrews said that? Jealousy—the obvious motive? Hardly. She couldn't be jealous of an unknown, as yet untried actress. Why—then . . . ?

"Say, Foster!" called Robertson Gamble, the character actor.

"Yes . . . ?"

"Finished casting your opera?"

"Not yet."

"I'll see Deane Powers tomorrow. Put in a good word for me, will you?"

"I'll try my best."

Other people came up. The talk became general.

Then, a little later, Rita Andrews returned to him, touched his sleeve, and drew him away from the group into a corner.

"Let's sit down." She indicated a lavishly satin-upholstered love seat, a piece of furniture as hopelessly dated as an early Ford, which had seen service in a recent all-star Pinero revival.

Hartley, who had noticed the two wander off, followed. He took up a strategic position, half hidden by a great, carved Chinese screen that had been very much admired in *Chu Chin Chow*. He had abnormally sharp ears; had, furthermore, the faculty of being able to listen to one conversation

while taking part in another; and so, talking pleasantly to Arbuckle Jones and Mrs. O'Hara Frisby, he made mental notes of what was going on in the love seat.

"I've an idea," said Rita.

"Yes . . . ?"

"I want you to do a play for me."

"I'd like to," said Foster, pleased and flattered. "I'll have a talk with the Guv'nor about it."

"Where does he come in?"

"But—you're his star . . ."

"Forget it, big boy!" She dropped her mask of half great lady, half guttersnipe; was now wholly, unashamedly guttersnipe. "To hell with the old bozo! Two months from today, when my contract runs out, I quit him cold, see?"

And, while the eavesdropping Roy Hartley smothered a chuckle, while Foster stared in amazement, she went on:

"Me for the Playgoer's mob next season!"

"You—you mean it?"

"Nothing but! They're the ones who've got hair on their chests! They're the lads who've got life, independence, and youth! The Guv'nor's on the toboggan—take it from me—the old bean isn't so good any more. I'm sick of his cheap, theatrical tricks—and his baby spotlights give me a pain in the neck. I want to act in real plays, in real set-

tings . . . not in hokum plays and hokum settings —even if the spittoons *are* imported from Paris, France. I'm through with him. Foster," she said boyishly, "come on over to the Playgoers' yourself . . . we'll crash that gate together."

The playwright's good-looking, honest young face was a study in bewilderment.

"Look here, Miss Andrews . . . after the chance he's given me—it wouldn't be fair . . ."

"Conscience troubles — on Broadway?" she laughed. "Say—conscience is a still, small voice that has a habit of becoming stiller and smaller. The Guv'nor's through, I tell you. He may have been the big cheese before the Civil War . . . but all he is today is a rind of limburger."

"You exaggerate," replied Foster, smiling. "He's a wonder. I'd stake my last dime on him."

He was suspicious, even jealous, of Cardoza where Sally was concerned. But suspicion and jealousy had nothing to do with the man's great gifts. Besides, Sally might need him during rehearsals. He couldn't desert her. He'd have to go on with her and the Guv'nor, still loyal to one and loving the other.

"You're talking a lot of hooey," Rita told him, shaking her dark head. "You'll sing a different tune when your play's produced. If it's a success, he'll

hog all the credit. If it's a flop, he'll kick you in the pants."

He protested to the best of his abilities. But, by degrees, she was convincing him, and was quick to follow up her advantage.

"And that new girl of his—Sally Cameron . . ."

"Leave her out of it," he interrupted heatedly, in spite of his growing uneasiness. "She's . . ."

"Sweet and innocent? Oh—for crying out loud! Wait till the Guv'nor gets through with her. Not that I personally give a whoop in hell." Then, seeing him go pale with anger, she added: "No use getting sore at me. You can't hit me, you know. And, if you like her, you might do the decent thing and slip her a word of warning . . . if it isn't too late."

She strolled away. He stared after her, his cigarette burning down unnoticed between his fingers.

All the glamor was gone from the party. He made his way to the door and took French leave, while Rita went on her way rejoicing, dancing, flirting a little or more than a little, well satisfied with what she had done.

Foster had no male attraction for her. But she liked him in her careless way; and, aside from her liking, he was a playwright who, possibly, had something to contribute to the stage. The Guv'nor, old has-been though he was, still knew his onions

when it came to the pen-pushers, she thought. She had upset Foster emotionally—no doubt of it—and this, in turn, might upset him in his work. If his work suffered, the success of *Bedrock*—and, therefore, Sally Cameron's success—would be endangered . . . and Sally was Cardoza's new star-to-be.

"So much the better for me," she pondered, listening to Stanley Logan's latest, pungently witty anecdote, "if she comes a flop . . . and if I decide to stay on with the old man!"

If she decided! She knew perfectly well that her threat to quit had been in the nature of a bluff; suspected that Cardoza knew it, too. She had tried that same bluff before, unsuccessfully, at the time Cardoza had turned from her to the Hoyt girl.

"Well," she continued thinking, "Hoytie came a cropper, and the Cameron can flop too . . . and I guess I'll help matters along . . ."

And then, suddenly, she laughed; said to herself: "Just like one of the Guv'nor's climaxes!", as, at that precise moment, Ruth Hoyt herself appeared.

Ruth Hoyt had been to a Long Island roadhouse with Julius Beck, and, motoring home, the idea had seized her to drop in at Roy Hartley's. For the latter had not failed to ask her, without consulting Rita. He had thought the encounter would be amusing.

Beck had not taken kindly to the plan.

"Let's go home to the apartment—" he had said. "I'm tired."

"I'm not."

"But . . ."

"The night's still young—" she had reminded him— "and so am I."

He had sighed. He himself was no longer as young as he had been.

So, grumbling, sulky, he had left her at Hartley's door, was returning to his cool marble palace, his sleeping, obese wife, and his nervous, sickly talented son and heir, while Ruth Hoyt made her entrance . . . and a very effective one it was.

She wore a chiffon gown, the color of foaming, green sea water breaking at a prow. There were diamonds blazing around her throat, supplementing the routine rope of pearls, and other diamonds, in service-stripe bracelets, encircled her wrists and arms. The chiffon wrap she wore was heavily banded with chinchilla, and from the ensemble her small, round head, covered with carefully careless curls, rose like a synthetic daffodil.

"Hail, hail the gang's all here!" carolled Arbuckle Jones, alcoholically off key.

Most of the others took up the chorus and Rita, watching the crowd milling about Ruth, smiled faintly.

Once her feeling toward the other had been very

bitter. But she experienced no such antagonism now. Ruth was no longer a rival.

She had improved in manner and appearance since those earlier yet not so distant days, Rita decided, looking Ruth over. She had become quite charming, really; was so entirely artificial that she was delightful: with her golden curls, her skin painted an incredible pink and white, her lips like all midsummer's roses. Honest-to-God, baby-faced innocence was extremely obnoxious to Rita. But this meretricious, butter-won't-melt-in-my-mouth make-up was as silly and daring, as fragile and unreal as a wax doll.

"Hello, Good-looking!" Rita greeted her, brushing her lips carefully across Ruth's cheek, then looking hastily to see that she had done Ruth's artwork—and her own—no damage.

Ruth was rather amazed. She had met Rita only a few times and, these few times, had been cold-shouldered. She was a little afraid of the other girl's deliberate insolence, her self-confidence, her really genuine talent, her temperamental outbursts. When she had replaced Rita as Cardoza's mistress, she had felt much as Julius Beck felt now: embarrassed, yet with a definite sense of gratified vanity.

Entangled with her fear and vanity was a lurking admiration for the other who had fought her

way up from nothing and had, in a measure, beaten the Guv'nor at his own game. For Rita had used him, ruthlessly and clear-sightedly; had never been faithful to him; and now, that their emotional connection was long since at an end, continued to use him . . . or so Ruth believed. Rita seemed to be the only one of his many former stars whom he continued to manage and cater to after the song had ended. It was a case of the melody—the melody of clinking coins—lingering on.

The two girls sat down on the love seat.

Rita gossiped idly a moment, admired Ruth's diamonds, made a not very veiled, punning wisecrack about Ruth's being at someone's "beck and call," and then remarked, casually:

"So sorry your play was a flop, Ruthie!"

"Sorry—my foot!" thought Ruth; but replied, smiling:

"Right back at you! Sorry your last opera didn't exactly roll in the well-known mazuma!"

Rita looked up, lazy astonishment between her long lashes. Ruth, she considered, had learned a thing or two of late. On their few previous encounters she hadn't been so quick on the trigger.

"You score," she admitted with a laugh. "Anyway—it was the Guv'nor's fault. He goulashed up that play something to make the angels weep."

"Same with mine."

"I guess the old bimbo's getting gaga."

"Sure. Too many girl-friends."

"Senile!" was Rita's biting comment. "Got himself a new one, eh?"

"The Cameron? Well—" and Ruth's Virginia accent mated oddly with her Broadway idiom—"nothing much to her. Just a little pink rosebud out o' the sticks."

The two girls eyed each other, smiled, moved more closely together, as, for a mutual impulse.

"Got a cigarette?" asked Rita.

Ruth produced a lovely case in green enamel, set with diamonds and tiny oblongs of onyx. There was a lighter to match.

"Gee!" exclaimed Rita. "The cat's whiskers!"

"Want it?" asked Ruth.

"Want it?" echoed the other, amazed. "You bet I do!"

"Well—" dropping the case in Rita's lap—"help yourself to the mustard. See—*R*—your initial—same's mine. I got a dozen of the damned things—in every color. Julius hasn't much imagination. He's like a Chinese cook . . . tell him you like stewed tomatoes, and you get 'em for breakfast, lunch, and dinner."

"Really want me to have it?"

"Yes."

"Won't be sorry—tomorrow?"

"Not a chance. If I want another I'll tell Julius to get it," bragged Ruth. "Glad you like it."

"I adore pretty things," said Rita, touching the case caressingly; and added, smiling into Ruth's blue eyes: "You know—you're very pretty yourself . . ."

"Oh—" embarrassed, but pleased.

"You are!"

They smiled at each other sympathetically, their mutual distrust of Sally Cameron forming one of several common meeting grounds.

"Well—" said Rita after a while— "now that you're all bedded down in platinum and diamonds and cigarette cases and pre-war Bourbon—I guess you've given up all thoughts of the stage?"

"Never!" exclaimed Ruth, and here she was honest. "Nothing means as much to me as the theatre. I *know* I can act. Yes! I *can!* I haven't had the proper chance. The Guv'nor—oh—he liked me—for a time . . . you know how that is . . . and decided that because I'm blonde and need to watch my diet that I was the type for his old-fashioned romantic plays . . . tears and sniffles and 'forgive me, darling' and 'I've loved you all along'—and all that kind of tripe. Just because of my figure . . ."

"I like your figure. . . ." Rita's impudent hand caressed the other girl's plump shoulder.

Again Ruth was embarrassed—and a little stirred.

"Say—what's the big idea?" she inquired. "Trying to make me?"

"Try and find out!"

"Don't be silly," advised Ruth, without much conviction; went on: "I know that, with the proper vehicle, I can put myself across. I'll make a stab at it anyway. Julius'll pull the strings . . . and then I'll show the Guv'nor."

Rita flung her cigarette into a potted palm.

"Good egg—Julius?" she inquired, casually.

"Hell of a good egg!"

A pause. Then Rita shot her bolt:

"Ruthie! I've got a peach of an idea!"

"Yes . . . ?"

"What about us—you and me—doing a play together?"

Ruth shivered with excitement. The two of them . . . ? Perhaps co-starred? She herself so fair; Rita so dark. The one a perfect foil for the other.

"Oh—" she whispered, flattered, breathless—"you—and me?"

"None other. I might get Foster to write the play. Real play. None of your pretty-pretty Cardoza stuff. We ought to go over big together . . . we're so darned different!" She flung out her sup-

ple, fine hand, caught Ruth's, held it palm turned to palm. "What do you think, kid?"

"Swell!"

"All right. Come to tea—at my place—tomorrow. We'll talk about . . . the play."

She laughed a little and Ruth flushed; and then someone shouted:

"Ham and eggs! Breakfast!"

"Breakfast!" echoed Rita. "Golly—I'm starved. Come on!" And they walked to the long table where Rita, mixing high-balls for herself and Ruth, waving aside the men who elbowed up to help her, handed a glass to Ruth and lifted her own.

"To us!" was her toast.

Arbuckle Jones watched; smiled; thought his thoughts.

"For Christ's sweet sake, Rita!" came his crude comment. "When did *you* turn ambisexterous?"

"Ask your English boy-friend!" rejoined Rita with a not so wise wise-crack.

Breakfast went over with a roar. But without the host.

For, in his small study, Roy Hartley was hitting the typewriter with all his fingers, including the thumbs.

His column! Clicked off in fever heat!

A Western Union boy summoned and sent off with it to his paper for the second morning edition

—which was the first for Broadway's late-rising children.

And what a column! What sensational gossip!

Gossip on Broadway. Gossip on Forty-Second Street. Gossip in the Astor lobby, the Algonquin, the *Lambs*, the *Friars*, the managerial offices.

"Heard the dirt, Jake?"

"What is it now, Lee?"

"Here—give a look—Roy Hartley's column!"

"I don't give a damn what he says about me!"

"Not about you — this time! About the Guv'nor!"

The other read; exclaimed religiously:

"Oh—for the love of the Board of Health!"

"Say—won't the Guv'nor be wild!"

"You've sed it, boy!"

Not that any names were mentioned. But to all those who had the sign and countersign of the Broadway Lodge it became clear that Robert Foster, Leo Cardoza's new playwright, was at work on a drama for the Playgoers' Guild . . . a drama in which both Rita Andrews and Ruth Hoyt would appear . . . "the two little girls," wrote Roy Hartley, with a snicker, "have sworn eternal friendship! Laugh that off, friends, Romans, citizens!"

Sally Cameron, too, read.

She shrugged her shoulders.

Why shouldn't Bob write plays for other people,

other women, other managers? It was his right. But —the old cry, hurting her heart— "he might have told me!"

She thought of Foster; thought of Cardoza.

"The Guv'nor—" she said to herself— "after all he's the only one who's straightforward . . . he doesn't lie . . . he doesn't plot . . . oh—there's no one like him!"

CHAPTER ELEVEN

GRIGGS entered the small studio and slammed the morning paper down on Cardoza's desk.

"What d'you think of this for a half-baked, double-crossing damned fool?" he wanted to know, his thin finger pointing out Roy Hartley's scandal column.

Slowly the Guv'nor read the marked item. He did not seem angry. On the contrary, a sunny, rather self-satisfied smile curled his fleshy lips.

"Success—even unproven success, the mere promise of success—turns many a silly young head," he remarked sententiously. For it was typical of him that, whatever the provocation, whatever his mental or psychic state, excitement, sardonic amusement, joy or sorrow, profound and genuine or meretricious and faked enthusiasm, he somehow managed to round his periods with strenuous and stately grandiloquence. "I am used to ingratitude. In fact, I expect it. Besides, with Hartley, one can never tell exactly how much truth there is in anything he writes."

"Where there's smoke . . ." began Griggs doggedly.

"Where there's smoke," interrupted the producer, "there's not necessarily a conflagration. Dung heaps, too, have a habit of smoking. This sort of gossip doesn't matter, Jack. It is—ah—part of Broadway's tribute, tribute with reverse English, to me. And as to Foster . . ."

He was silent; shrugged his shoulders; and Katharine Healy, who had picked up the paper, commented:

"The boy's an ass!"

"Granted!" Cardoza replied negligently. "At times I think all playwrights are asses . . . or they wouldn't be playwrights. Come—we've wasted precious minutes on trivialities . . . back to work!"

He was neither hurt nor disappointed; was, indeed, pleased. The theatrical game was his entire, involved life. He was suspicious of everyone connected with it. Yet, in a way, since there is no greater satisfaction to the egoist than triumph in spite of hate and competition, he fed upon the enmity of his rivals.

He said as much to Katharine Healy.

"Let them try and fight me. They'll soon find themselves up against a stone wall. Nothing suc-

ceeds like success. That's a good line, isn't it, Healy?"

"It's been a good line since Oscar Wilde wrote it."

"The truth of it remains. All these little jackals snarling and showing their teeth . . . how can they affect a lion?"

"Why so zoölogical this morning, L. C.?"

He laughed. He was quite happy. Aside from everything else, he was shrewd enough to realize that Sally Cameron would regard this rumor as a breach of faith on Foster's part; and he worked on with keen, effective energy, with his employees on the run, in and out of the studio, and all the theatre, from roof to cellar, in a subdued uproar of casting and selecting and discarding and planning, and himself the commander-in-chief, marshalling his forces, shouting his orders with mouth of iron and lungs of brass.

"Get busy, you slackers! Get busy! Almighty God—must I do *all* the work? Deane—Deane . . ." he called to the casting director whom, a moment earlier, he had sent out on an urgent mission— "where is that damned measly incompetent . . . oh—" as Powers reëntered hurriedly— "there you are, Deane! Get somebody to play the maid . . . in the third act . . ."

"I've already spoken to Lucille Turner . . ."

"*You* have spoken—without consulting me? Whose theatre is this anyway . . . ?"

"Sorry, Guv'nor," Powers told him, not particularly dashed. "But it's such a small, unimportant part . . ."

"Which shows how little you know! No part is unimportant! A good production is like a good engine. Everything down to the tiniest cog must be smooth, oiled, in perfect condition and coördination. Get me some girls . . . a lot of girls, Deane . . . I'll look them over myself."

Then, when Powers, his stubbly hair on end, had left:

"Harrigan! Where the hell's Harrigan?"

Someone sent for the latter, the lean property man who, belonging to a good, strong Labor Union, did not fear the Guv'nor as much as his white-collar employees.

He came up to the studio, and Cardoza demanded:

"That flower vase—cheap little flower vase in the miners' boarding-house scene . . . let me see flower vases . . . quantities of them . . . all sorts . . ."

"Plenty in the warehouse, Guv'nor."

"Buy new ones. I must be able to pick and choose." He turned to the play script; read; looked up; shouted: "Grossman . . . I want Grossman . . ."

Louis Grossman, the German chief electrician, a large, bulky man with the head of a Beethoven, appeared, evidently out of the nowhere, and was greeted with a roar and a hearty slap on the back.

"Louis—remember that mine disaster in the second act?"

"Yes, Guv'nor?"

"I've an idea—a wonderful idea . . . realism, authentic, unbeatable . . ."

He waved everyone aside except Katharine Healy and the electrician who, pulling up a chair, listened with his usual, grudging admiration, as Cardoza explained in detail, his black eyes shining, his hands never still.

Now and then—without effect—Grossman expostulated:

"But, Guv'nor . . . that'll cost . . ."

"What do I care? We're staging a mine disaster. It must be real. It must make the audience gasp—shudder—pull 'em out of their seats . . ."

"I'll need extra help—more electric equipment . . ."

"Get the whole damned Westinghouse plant! But—get results, Louis!"

"As you say, Guv'nor!"

And Grossman departed, shaking his fine head, deploring, cursing in English and German, but as

enthusiastic as Cardoza. He'd do his bit toward putting the show across, he thought.

So thought the others. Everyone worked, worked, worked, while the Guv'nor seemed in a dozen places at once, his fingers poking in every pie, bullying, roaring, flattering, encouraging, no detail too small for discussion, trusting no man's initiative save his own. And they admired him, feared him, obeyed him, loved him. Good old Guv'nor . . . great old boy. There was no one like him on Broadway—no, nor in all America.

Bruce Donaldson, the art director, cabled from Paris. He had been successful, had bought everything in record time.

Katharine Healy smiled.

"Same in Paris as in New York," she told Ben Levi. "All you have to do is to mention L. C.'s name."

"Sure," grumbled the other. "All you've got to do is mention his name—and they soak you an extra wad of jack!"

But even he was proud of the chief. Recklessly extravagant the Guv'nor might be. But—he was the Guv'nor. Unique, a genius, a human dynamo; and he proved it again shortly afterwards as, with Powers and Katharine Healy and Robert Foster who had come in watching, he looked over the girls whom the theatrical employment agencies had sent

over to apply for the maid's part and, skilfully, meticulously, put them through their paces:

"Walk! Run! Turn! Door bell . . . answer it! Good God, girl, you're not going to a funeral . . . you're answering a bell! No—not too much hurry . . . no real maid's ever in a real hurry! Take that handkerchief . . . dust that mirror . . . dust it, I say . . . don't wash its face . . ."

Foster looked on, amazed and amused. He had arrived at the studio in some trepidation. He had read Hartley's column and had been annoyed and yet, so oddly illogical is human nature, a little pleased and flattered. After all, truth or untruth or half-truth, it meant publicity. But what would Cardoza think . . . ?

He had begun tentatively:

"About that column . . . all eyewash, Guv'nor . . ."

"Column?" Cardoza had smiled. "What column? No—don't explain. Newspaper gossip doesn't interest me—and I'm busy as hell. Sit down—and don't bother me."

He turned to one of the actresses, sending the others away. She was young, with a pretty, thin face. He shot out his commands—and she walked, ran, answered door bells, dusted mirrors, spoke a few lines to his satisfaction.

"You'll do," he said. "Fifty a week."

She flushed. She had been out of work a long time, and it was many weary miles back to Iowa and a soda fountain in father's heavily mortgaged drug store.

She stammered her thanks, when Cardoza interrupted:

"Wait. Take off your hat."

She did so, exhibiting a mop of curly, red hair, and he shook his head:

"Sorry. Won't do. My star, Miss Cameron, has red hair."

She stumbled from the room, sick at heart, her bright hopes crushed, and the last thing she heard was the Guv'nor's irritated exclamation:

"Girl with black hair—that's what I want, Deane!"

So, presently, a black-haired actress was engaged, while the producer said to Foster:

"Did you notice the little brick-top?"

"Rather pretty."

"Pretty enough. But—her clothes were shiny, her shoes down at the heel, and she looked hungry. God—" and he meant it— "that's one thing I can't stand, Bob. These poor little devils—hungry—hungry . . . so many of them—and the opportunities in our profession so few! Why—when I think that, perhaps, through my refusal, I've driven her on the streets . . . ah—" he sighed; added,

quoting a line from a play of his own which, possibly, had failed because of too many such lines: "The poor, poor little girls—the drab, soiled lilies of the night pavement!"

Foster looked astonished. The bathos — he thought—the cheap, hokum ten-twent'-thirt' of it! He supposed the elder man's moment of drippy sentiment a pure fake.

But Katharine Healy was of different opinion. She recognized the genuine emotion back of the Guv'nor's tawdry words, and was proved right when, in the afternoon, Powers came and announced nervously:

"There's a girl in my office, Guv'nor. She insists on seeing you."

"Tell her I'm in Atlantic City."

"I did. But it wasn't a go. She says she *knows* you're here—says she *knows* you'll give her a chance—says she *knows* you'll be fair."

The Guv'nor smiled. Like most intensely selfish men, he prided himself upon his sense of justice.

"Send her in," he replied, patronizingly.

The girl entered a few moments later. She was pretty in a thin, washed-out way. She had her hat in her hand, showing a mop of curly, black hair.

"Is the maid's part filled yet, Mr. Cardoza?" she asked.

Suddenly he gave a shout of laughter, of appre-

ciation. It was the little red-head of the morning . . . must have spent her last, precious dollars on the lengthy, headachy ordeal of having her hair dyed . . .

"Good soldier!" he approved. "The part is filled. But—" as her face fell— "you shall have another."

He addressed Foster:

"She'll play the second maid."

"There's no second maid, Guv'nor."

"There shall be. You'll write the part in." And, to the girl: "What's your name?"

"Regina Evans."

"You're engaged, Miss Evans—at sixty a week."

She gave tremulous thanks and followed Powers down to his office while Levi, who was present, mourned aloud:

"Same old story. Play starts with a small cast. Then parts added till the overhead becomes top-heavy. Do you want to ruin yourself, Guv'nor, for a dyed strawberry blonde?"

But the other would brook no interference.

"Shut your mouth, Ben!" he roared. "It's *my* play!"

"*His* play—" thought Foster; then thought again, sharply: "It's damned well getting to *be* his play—losing all semblance to mine . . ." and he returned to his hotel to lean over the typewriter

and try to fit the new girl into his by now confused dramatic scheme of things.

A little later Cardoza, aflame with a new idea in regard to *Bedrock* and too impatient to wait for Powers to come to him, entered the latter's office. A woman stood by the casting director's desk, a slight, haggard woman with burnt-out eyes and slender, appealing hands.

"Nothing doing, I'm afraid," Powers was telling her. "No—Mr. Cardoza can't see you, Miss Roberts."

But he had already seen her; had recognized her despite the false name, despite the years which had passed.

She turned to him. She trembled.

"Outside, Deane!" the producer ordered huskily.

Powers left with a curious, backward glance. What on earth had so affected the Guv'nor? Who was she? Then, all at once, he knew, swore aloud, marveled . . . heard, through the half-open door, Cardoza say to her.

"You know the way to my studio. Wait for me there."

She departed; and, alone, he stood by the desk.

Shirley Parker—he thought. After twenty years she had returned to him, as he had once told her she would. Shirley Parker. He had loved her as he had loved no other woman; had hated her as he

had hated no other human being. And here she was now, begging for a job. For a moment he savored his triumph. But the taste was bitter.

He crossed the threshold.

"Deane," he said, "I've sent Miss—ah—Miss Roberts to my studio. See that I'm undisturbed for ten minutes."

He went up slowly. His shoulders were stooped.

But, when he faced the woman in the studio, he stood straight and lifted his chin and clasped his hands behind his back in a gesture she knew well —very well.

"Mr. Cardoza—" she began, tears in her eyes.

He looked at her. Shirley Parker—the greatest actress of them all! The woman who had stabbed him treacherously . . . not alone in an emotional, deeply personal sense by deceiving him with a cheap comedian; but also professionally, financially, by going over to a rival producer at a time when he had been hard hit and fighting for his theatrical life with his back against a painted property wall.

He continued looking at her, silent; and she repeated:

"Mr. Cardoza . . ."

"Am I no longer Leo to you?" he asked, suddenly, gently, wistfully.

The tears streamed down her ravaged, but still lovely face.

"Leo," she said, "when I left you, you swore that, some day, I'd crawl to you on my hands and knees and beg you for a part. Here I am. Enjoy your triumph."

"No, no, no . . ." he replied . . . "don't—oh—don't be silly." He came nearer to her. "Shirley—you—you were happy for a time—successful . . . ?"

"Yes, Leo."

"And—now . . . ?"

"And now I come to you—again. In—in your new play—I heard about a part—the part of a scrubwoman—in the first act . . . Leo—give it to me. I—I can act . . . you know—you taught me!"

"Yes. I taught you. And you were great, Shirley—the greatest who ever marched to victory under my banner. You were the talk of Broadway—the talk of America . . ."

"That's over," she said shortly. "Give me the part."

"No!" came his answer while Katharine Healy, who had come out on the balcony, thought there was never a play as dramatic as this. "You can't have the part."

"Please, please . . ."

"No!"

"Leo!" she shrieked, in complete abandon to

terror. "Leo—oh—" she was without pride, without shame— "I must eat!"

"The part is too small for you."

"I don't care!"

"I do!"

"Please, please, please!" she begged frantically; and now she was actually on her knees to him.

"No!" he reiterated; and Katharine Healy, on the balcony, shuddered a little.

"You're a hard man," sobbed Shirley Parker.

"I'm a soft man." He lifted her to her feet; held her there a moment, his arm about her shoulders. "Once we were partners, you and I. I cannot degrade you, nor degrade myself, with this small part. Once you were my most glorious creation . . ."

"A creation that has been broken—shattered . . ."

He returned to his desk, sat down, and lifted his steady, black eyes to her face.

"A creation," he told her calmly, "which I shall make whole again. Ah—" and here he lied superbly, acted enthusiastically, convincingly— "I have the very play for you—with a perfect title: *The Image in the Heart*. I shall produce it very soon. Then you shall return to Broadway more wonderful than ever. In the meantime—for I want no other producer to steal you from me—to steal

you the second time—you're under contract to me . . ."

"Leo!"

"Don't thank me. It's business. Go to Powers' office, my dear. I'll send Levi to you there . . . you remember—Levi?"

She went out, shaking from head to foot. In the past she had loved him, hated him . . . and had left him, laughing a little, thinking him puny, defeated, futile. Now she could neither love nor hate. All she could feel for Cardoza was a sort of frightened, amazed veneration . . .

He—oh—she thought—he was *big!*

He was eternally youthful . . .

Yet he did not look youthful, but old and haggard, as, shortly afterwards, in answer to his summons, Levi came to him.

"Ben," he said, "Shirley Parker is in Deane's office. Give her a contract—for—oh—seven years—at a decent salary!"

Then, as the other started to protest, he interrupted him with a sharp cry:

"Be quiet! Be quiet! And—never mention her name again . . . never let her set a foot inside my studio . . . never let me look on her face . . . never—again!"

"Very well, Guv'nor," murmured Levi and left,

while Cardoza sank back in his chair and reached for his smelling salts.

The little scene had shaken him to his depths. His emotions had been too terribly conflicting: memories of love, memories of hate, a searing pity, a frightful, biting irony . . . a sense of devastation and of loss.

Once she had beaten him. Beaten, in her turn, she had returned to him. Yet, curiously, he preferred to remember her as he had seen her on that night, twenty years ago, triumphant, laughing, insulting and mocking him . . .

He looked up as Katharine Healy came down from the gallery.

"You—" he asked— "you heard . . . you saw . . . ?"

"Yes, L. C."

"It was horrible . . ."

She nodded. She knew, and he knew, that there would never be another play for Shirley Parker. She would draw her salary as long as she lived; and now Cardoza said sulkily, self-defensively as a small boy who explains away an act of kindness lest the other fellows think him a sissy:

"Damn it all— I can't let her starve!"

The tall Irishwoman smoothed his white hair; she touched her firm, compressed lips to his broad forehead.

"You're a good boy, L. C.," she said gently.

He rose.

"Cut out the sob stuff!" he exclaimed. "We've work to do, Healy!"

He went to the telephone; called to the casting director:

"I want you, Deane."

The latter came not much later—it was getting toward evening—and smiled, pleased with himself, when his employer told him to be on the watch for a good character actress to play the part of the slatternly scrubwoman in the first act—the part which Shirley Parker had begged for.

"Guv'nor," he said, "I've the very type—she's in my office now . . . but she's too damned real . . ."

"Meaning . . . ?"

"The scrubwoman in the play—'Lottie'—is supposed to have been ruined through drink, drugs, God knows what . . . and this woman waiting in my office . . ."

"Let me see her immediately!" cried Cardoza. "Don't you hold out on me!"

Powers left, returned with the woman, introduced her as Ella Meadows, and vanished somewhere in the shadows.

He had described her correctly. She was too real: a human wreck if ever there was one; shabbily

dressed; her floppy, outmoded hat trailing a broken plume; the hands not quite clean.

Cardoza, who was fastidiously clean in his own person, gave a little shudder. Good God—he thought—how many ruins of humanity would he be forced to interview today! Well—it was part of his life, part of the theatre. Besides, though the woman affected him almost to nausea, she interested him. He was like a surgeon probing a festering wound, his gorge rising, but his mind clear and his hands sure.

"Your experience, Miss Meadows . . . ?"

She told him; told him the brutal truth; with a drink-roughened voice: star on the English provincial stage—a falling, fallen star . . . "gin, you know, Mr. Cardoza . . ." and all the rest, the colonies, the Orient . . . then she'd drifted to the States . . . "and now—look at me!"

He did so, reluctantly. He believed her. Every word rang true as a fresh-minted coin.

"You may have the part, Miss Meadows."

"I don't know how to thank you . . ."

"You can thank me in just one way," he replied sternly. "This part is to be *acted*. You have to be stone sober to act a drunkard, remember . . ."

"I'll remember," she cried, dry-eyed, her heart beating until it hurt her. "I . . . I'll pull myself up by my boot straps, Mr. Cardoza."

"I believe you and . . . God bless you!"

Here, in such human relations, the bitter human relations of the stage, the Guv'nor was at his best and most humane. Here his pity for the down-and-outers among the playerfolk—his own folk, blood of his blood and bone of his bone—was predominant. It was genuine. It was practical and effective.

Yet it was a pity which, in the last analysis, glorified *him;* left him with the dramatic tag line, the final curtain, in his magnificent character part of deputy-providence.

CHAPTER TWELVE

ON the following morning, at nine o'clock sharp, the rehearsals of *Bedrock* began in the rehearsal room of the Cardoza theatre, directly below the auditorium.

It was very large, ninety by fifty, but stuffy and rather airless, low-ceilinged, sparsely equipped: a few rickety deal tables, a tinkly piano with sticky, dusty keys, a dozen or so shabby, creaking, moth-eaten chairs—not enough to accommodate the whole cast had they all wished to sit down at the same time. There was no stage, properly speaking. Instead, a portion of the floor was marked off with chalk; and chalk, too, marked where, on the real stage, the necessary furniture, props, windows and doors would be.

It was all very shoddy; was, despite its shoddiness, somehow very sure of itself, even blasé—it had seen and helped along so much theatrical history—and mysteriously adequate to mysterious, dramatic moments and climaxes.

From the start the work was hard. But the

Guv'nor was more pitiless to himself than to the others who dragged themselves home at night, tired to the very marrow.

Tired; though inspired, keen to carry on.

They were in their element; redundantly self-satisfied; eager to show off themselves to themselves and to strut their stuff in front of the mirror of mutual admiration; chanting a megalomaniac paean of:

"Indeed but we are the people,
Our throne is above the king's,"

and looking with tolerant, amused contempt upon the outsider, the playwright, Robert Foster—who was young and resented things and returned their contempt quite without tolerance or amusement.

He found himself as theoretically necessary but as personally and pictorially unimportant as the bridegroom at a large, social church wedding. He discovered that, though, in a way, it was his play which paid these people's bread and rent and clothes, he, as the individual, seemed trivial, a fifth wheel to them. A stenographer by his side, he sat on an uncomfortable chair, dictating new lines and scenes at the Guv'nor's insistence, chewing his pencil, cudgeling his flagging imagination, bending over his writing pad, aching in every cramped muscle when he got up to eat greasy, unappetizing food.

For lunch and dinner were served, after a fashion, on the premises—premises entirely dominated by Cardoza who drove his players, that first week, with the well-known hand of iron in the velvet glove of flattery.

Flattery, in the beginning, was the order of the day. It served as a tonic to weary limbs and frayed minds.

Everyone was splendid! Everyone was shaping up in fine style! Everyone's work was amazing!

"I'm proud of you, boys and girls! God bless you!"

Praise for all; particularly for Sally; and not a grain of praise for Robert Foster. The Guv'nor hardly noticed him, save to bark orders or to argue heatedly over certain changes in the play script.

It was a blow to Foster's natural pride and vanity. But he was unhappy for other reasons. He could not avoid seeing, noticing and pigeonholing the Guv'nor's obvious attentions to Sally. He was sympathetic with her, gentle, paternal, never drove her as he did the others; and if this did not escape Foster, it certainly did not escape the rest of the company. One or two, who had played under Cardoza before this, were so accustomed to his methods with pretty little, new stars that they merely shrugged and smiled maliciously. Others were openly astonished, and their comments were ta-

bascoed. At all events, the tacit admission of the entire cast was that Sally was the Sultan's most recent favorite, with a favorite's rights and privileges—and duties. So—players, courtiers, sycophants—they catered to her, flattered her.

Sally, on the other hand, did not notice. She accepted the producer's attentions and leniency and helpfulness as a matter of course. She was his star, wasn't she? She was young, ambitions, perhaps a little conceited; and it seemed natural to her that the Guv'nor should single her out.

She was deeply engrossed in her work and talked to few. The only friend she made was Ella Meadows. There was something about that haggard, eager, talented old Englishwoman which drew her with a sort of odd, tender pity. Ella Meadows seemed so alone, so tragically anxious to succeed.

Besides, Cardoza told Sally about her.

"I had to give her a chance," he added, "because of what she was—once—in the innocence of her golden youth. It won't hurt you to know her. It's life—and you must learn to face life as it is—in the raw—unflinchingly—with clear, fearless eyes if you are to become a great artist."

"Think there's hope for me?" she smiled.

"I'm sure of it, child."

He kissed her hand, fondled her shoulder.

There was an exchange of hooded glances be-

tween heavy and character woman, juvenile and supernumerary; more glances, whispers, on other occasions; until, toward the end of the week, the gossip began to run rather high as, the first excitement of breaking fresh ground past, the players settled down to arduous and sometimes monotonous digging, and started to choose friends or enemies.

They would loll around, waiting for their particular scenes to be rehearsed, and swap whispered opinions about the play, its chances, their own chances—and the chances of the new star.

So Saturday came. Everyone was worn out. The Guv'nor still encouraged, complimented. But a slightly perceptible vein of sarcasm was creeping into his praise.

Randall Phelps, the heavy, and McDonald Norris, the juvenile, who was playing the part of "Lester," had sat down not far from Foster.

"Show looks good," remarked the juvenile.

"Too early to tell. Many a show shapes up swell at rehearsal and flops the opening night."

"Worked for the Guv'nor before?"

"Twice."

"I haven't. He's very sympathetic," smiled McDonald Norris whom Cardoza had profusely flattered that morning. "Most intelligent direction I've ever experienced."

"That so?" Randall Phelps laughed grimly.

"Wait till he gets into his stride. He'll cut out the candy and hand us all the prussic acid. I know, dear boy."

"But—" the other was unconvinced— "he seems so satisfied—"

"Always does—the first week. Same a few years ago . . . I was with him—when Rita Andrews made her initial great hit in *The Heart of Minnetonka.* Gosh—that was a great play . . . and Rita was the berries, believe me!"

"Had a row with the Guv'nor, eh?"

"Sure. The Queen is dead . . . long live the Queen!" And he gestured toward Sally.

Foster stopped scrawling on his yellow pad. The stenographer had gone out. He was alone in the isolation of the negligible author. He listened, flushing, his jaw set hard.

McDonald Norris was rather new to Broadway. He said:

"Oh—I don't think our new Queen is so hot. She's more like an amateur. Cardoza's giving her most of the fat lines . . . I don't think much of her acting."

"Say!" chortled the heavy. "For sweet innocence you take the plaster derby and the chiffon ice pick. I wasn't speaking of her acting—at least not on the stage . . ."

"You mean. . . ?"

"Her acting—in a bed . . ."

And, at that moment, Foster rose with a leap and crashed his clenched fist into Phelps' smiling face.

The latter went down in a welter of chair legs. McDonald Norris protested: "Oh I say . . ." and removed himself from the immediate battle line. There was, throughout the room, excitement, tense, hectic, and Cardoza came running to the scene of action.

Phelps was on his feet now, holding a handkerchief to his handsome, bleeding nose, while the Guv'nor demanded:

"What the hell's up?"

The heavy replied quickly before Foster could speak—for Cardoza might not be too pleased to have his own and his star's name so freely bandied about—:

"Just a misunderstanding, Guv'nor. Foster objected to something I said—about his play."

"I see!" Cardoza turned to Foster who, too, though for different reasons, was glad not to have Sally's name drawn into the quarrel. "I won't have any street brawls in my theatre, Bob. I believe in your play. But if an actor in my company treads on your corns a little, you can take it and shut up."

Then he spoke to Phelps:

"And as for you—if you don't like the play you can hand over your part and . . ."

"No offence, Guv'nor. Won't happen again."

"Very well." And to the playwright: "You'd better apologize to Phelps."

"I'll see him damned first."

"Oh—" Cardoza raised his eyebrows— "as you say. Only—no more battles. You're really too sensitive about your ewe lamb."

He returned to the center of the room and clapped his hands.

"Take up that scene, Sally. From your father's entrance . . . cue . . . hey—cue line . . ."

But Sally ran up to him.

"What was it, Guv'nor?" she whispered anxiously.

"Nothing vital, my dear. Foster overheard a criticism of his play—touched him on the raw, it seems . . ."

But the result of the incident was ill-feeling. McDonald Norris and Randall Phelps told their side of the story, more or less camouflaged, to the other actors who agreed that Foster had pulled a bone. Probably the latter was crazy about the Cameron—they thought—and jealous of Cardoza. So they looked at him askance; liked him less and less. After all, he was a playwright, an outsider. He did not belong—on Broadway—except by suf-

ferance. And, in their twisted, queer actors' brains, they felt an elation of vicarious triumph at the thought that the Guv'nor, one of their own people, was getting the better of this rank outsider.

The Guv'nor too—for Griggs, who had listened here and there, had reported to him—found out the truth of the quarrel. He smiled. He did not mind the gossip.

It really pleased him.

He considered it a compliment: to himself—and to Sally.

On Sunday there was no rehearsal; and Foster, stewing glumly over his fracas with Phelps and what had led up to it, went to see Sally in the afternoon. Emily was out calling on her poor relations, listening acidly to their fulsome, envious exclamations as to how lucky she was in being allowed to work for Leo Cardoza, and Sally was resting.

She herself opened the door, a drooping little figure in thin kimono, her bare feet thrust into sandals.

"Bob—I'm not dressed . . . and I'm tired and hot . . ."

"Let me come in—just for a minute . . . I want to talk to you . . ."

"Very well."

They entered the living room.

"About yesterday—" he began—"the row . . ."

"Don't speak of it, Bob. You're so thin-skinned. No play is perfect, from a stage angle, until it's produced."

"Oh—" Foster was furious as, in the stereotyped remark, he recognized the Guv'nor's more or less fine Italian hand. "Listen, Sally . . ."

"No, no! What right have you to pick a vulgar fight just because Phelps said something detrimental about your play . . ."

"It wasn't the play!" he shouted. "It was something—something vile—about you!"

"About—*me?*"

"Yes. You and Cardoza—damn his soul!"

There was a short pause. Then she said coolly:

"I think you'd better explain."

"Why should I? You're old enough to—oh—to know *something*—without having a chart drawn," he replied bitterly. "Everyone's talking about you and the Guv'nor—saying you've supplanted Rita Andrews—yes, and Ruth Hoyt, too—in his personal affections . . . everyone!"

"Who, for instance, besides Phelps?"

Foster started at the entire cast and worked back—to Hartley and Rita and Mother O'Neill.

"It's gossip," said Sally, pale, rather hard. "The Guv'nor has been my best friend. Nothing else. You know it."

"Of course I do."

"Then—why listen to the gossip?"

"How can I help listening, Sally?"

"But—you needn't make it worse!"

"Worse . . . ?"

"Yes. By seeking a quarrel with a loose-mouthed actor—holding me up to ridicule . . ."

The feminine unfairness of the remark stung him.

"I'm wrong!" he cried, sarcastically. "I'm quite wrong."

"You bet you are. Besides—what business is it of yours?"

"But—Sally—I love you!"

"You've an odd way of showing it!"

"And you've an odd way of showing that you do *not* care for Cardoza!"

Of course neither meant anything of the sort. But they behaved as if they did. For it is strange how cruel love can be when two people are young; and strange, too, that a man and a woman should be kindly and considerate to each other, at least in little things, when they are acquaintances or merely friends, and that the moment the passion of love comes to them they should deem these little things all-important and bicker over them and be kindly and considerate no longer and become haughty and stubborn and unforgiving, and hurt

each other because of pride. Yes—it is strange beyond belief what a cold dwelling the pride of youth can make for warm love.

"I suppose," went on Sally, "it's because of this same love of yours that you wanted another girl in my part?"

"Eh?" He was amazed to breathlessness. "Are you out of your mind?"

"Mean to tell me there was no other girl?"

"It's a lie made up out of whole cloth! Who told you?"

"The Guv'nor—" triumphantly— "the Guv'nor himself!"

"It's still a lie!" he insisted violently.

Sally was crimson now. The Guv'nor—a liar? The thought seemed sacrilege.

"I don't believe you," she replied.

"You'd take his word against mine?"

"Why shouldn't I? Aren't you making up to Rita Andrews—writing a play for her . . . ?"

"Another lie!"

"I suppose everybody is a liar except yourself."

"She asked me to write a play for her—" he defended himself, rather lamely . . . "I couldn't exactly say no . . ."

"Oh—" triumphantly— "then it doesn't seem to be a lie after all! Bob," she went on, a little more

gently, "you're doing the Guv'nor an injustice—after all he's done for you . . ."

"Done for me?" He laughed bitterly. "Five hundred bucks advance—and works me like a dog—and makes me rewrite the play until I no longer recognize it—and . . ."

"Bob," she interrupted, "go home! I'm tired. If you think I want to use my one day of rest to quarrel and quibble, you're mistaken. And I don't believe a word you say against the Guv'nor—you're just plain silly and jealous . . . and as to your fight with Phelps—it was absurd . . . it made me ridiculous . . . and I won't forgive you in a hurry!"

Thus, womanlike, she spoke.

And he, manlike, rising and looking blankly for his hat, rejoined:

"Women make me sick!"

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

REHEARSALS started again on the next day. Foster was hurt to the core of him. He was conscious of a growing resentment against Cardoza, against everybody connected with the play except Sally . . . and he was not quite sure, on that blue Monday, whether he loved her or not.

At Cardoza's insistence he wrote and rewrote, doggedly, a certain small, rather unimportant scene. The Guv'nor read his final result and jeered aloud.

"What's the matter with you, Foster?" he cried, for all to hear. "I've told you a dozen times how that scene should be handled, and you can't even follow instructions. What is it? Stupidity or stubborn vanity? Vanity, I guess. Once let a playwright, any playwright, have a piece accepted—and he thinks he's God Almighty!"

The cast snickered faintly. Foster flushed, stammered, tried to stand his ground.

But the other beat him down with a merciless hail of words, winding up:

"Go back to your newspaper—your scribbling about police courts and baseball—that's all you're good for!"

He was silent; then, suddenly, threw the script on the floor.

"Here!" he commanded. "Pick this up—and get to work on it like a man, not a moon calf!"

Foster turned pale with rage. He'd be damned if . . .

But, with a hard effort, he controlled himself. It was his play—and, estranged as he was with her for the time being, Sally's play, too. A bitter pill—humiliating—but it was up to him to swallow it.

He did. He picked up the typewritten pages and handed them to the Guv'nor without a word.

They stared at each other.

Perhaps, for the fraction of a moment, the producer was afraid, seeing the other's implacable eyes, his broad shoulders, set jaw, thin lips. This man was not an actor, a clown tragic or comic, to be kissed or kicked. He was—potentially dangerous . . . ?

Cardoza shrugged. He was no coward.

He turned to McDonald Norris.

"Take up that scene, Mac, from your entrance!" he shouted, while Randall Phelps whispered maliciously to Ella Meadows:

"Curtain! Applause—for the Guv'nor!"

But the Englishwoman shook her head.

"Oh—" she said in her husky, defeated voice—"it's a beastly shame!"

Sally thought so, too; and, later in the day, she managed to get Foster aside. She felt sorry for him. After all, in spite of their present hostilities, she loved him, and it had wounded and embarrassed her to see him lose face before the company; and she was annoyed at Cardoza, disappointed, for she thought that, for once, he had been unjust.

"Don't take it to heart, Bob," she pleaded. "I'm sure the Guv'nor didn't mean it as harshly as it seemed . . ."

"You can't be my champion and his friend at the same time," he said brusquely, being young enough to consider pity the worst insult of all. "Now that he's made a laughing-stock of me I suppose you think you can afford to hand out the soothing syrup . . . a little trick you've learned from your boss . . . well, it doesn't go down with me!"

It was hardly just of him. But he had been too badly hurt to mince words. He walked off in one direction, she in the other, her chin held high, but her heart sore.

Perhaps the Guv'nor had been unfair. Well—Bob was more so . . .

The result was that she turned more and more toward the older man who, master psychologist that he was, master chessplayer with the pawns called human souls, saw deeply into the situation and made the most of it.

"I was hasty with our young friend," he confided to her. "I so dislike losing my temper . . ."

"I've no doubt he deserved it," she replied, a trifle bitterly.

"He didn't," Cardoza told her thoughtfully. "I was in the wrong. But I was still irritated about the other day—that brawl . . . he shouldn't have hit poor Phelps just because of some comment derogatory to his play . . ."

"It wasn't because of the play. Phelps said something . . ." She slurred; stopped.

"Yes . . . ?"

"Gossip about . . . about you and me . . ."

"I see." Cardoza looked astonished, and was not. "Very gallant of Foster to rush to your defense. Very gallant—and very foolish. Silent contempt is the only weapon against scandal. You will always be gossiped about because you are young and lovely and talented and in the public eye . . . and I will always be gossiped about because I am—well—Leo Cardoza. Gossip, my dear, is merely envy with a voice," he said—and thought: "That's a damned good line. I must write it down before I forget it."

Foster was in a black mood. What kept him from despair was his vital, virile, earthy strength. He got through the rest of the day somehow, withdrawing into his psychic shell against the actors' malicious glances and whispers and giggles.

Broadway . . . ? To hell with it! And—a little childishly, but quite effectively, calling on his local patriotism for help—he thought: What about Montana . . . what about the country that had borne and nourished him? A clean country, a hard country, a country to try a man's steel! And these others—these simpering mummers—Cardoza himself—how long would they last—out there?

Buffoons, these people! Grubby, nasty, rather indecent buffoons . . . stalking about in falseface and peruke—picking up crumbs of public applause, public gold . . .

Listen to them ranting! God—the swine, selfish, footling, arrogant! Look at them strutting about like coons in an old-fashioned cakewalk competition!

The thoughts—the contempt they bred—helped his self-esteem, his wounded vanity; did not help him where Sally Cameron was concerned; and, as a measure of escape, he began to drink more than he used to.

Two nights after the scene with Cardoza he stepped into a speakeasy in the West Forties. He

sat down and called for a straight whiskey. He was tired, and his eyes burned, and he was discouraged to his soul.

"Bob!"

He looked up. A tall, thin, elderly man was standing at his table; Bradbury Smith, the old vaudevillian through whom he had met Sally, who even now was acting Foster's little sketch in a two-a-day circuit.

Smith took a seat.

"How are you?" he asked. "How's the play? And how is Sally?"

At first Foster replied a little stiffly to the other's friendly questions. But, after drink number three, his heart full, his brain a bit addled, and his tongue loosened, he proceeded to pour out his grievances.

"The play's rotten. Cardoza has made me rewrite it until I don't even know it by sight. He's sexed it up. I'm sick to death of the whole thing . . . and he amuses himself making a fool of me before the company . . . and—as for Sally . . . oh—she and I bicker all the time. She's sold on Cardoza, thinks he's gold, thinks the sun rises and sets in him . . . and everyone's talking about her—and him . . ."

"They would," decided Smith gently.

"You've heard, too?"

"No," came Bradbury Smith's patient lie. "Of course not. But that's what they always say about

Cardoza and his new stars—about most managers and their stars. What's the difference? You know Sally!"

"She sticks up for him—defends him . . ."

"And she'll keep on defending him until she finds out by herself. Women are like that. Tell you what I'll do, Bob. I'll drop in and see her next Sunday. She may listen to me . . . I've no axe to grind . . ."

"But—oh—" Foster was a little ill-at-ease—"you mustn't tell her anything that I . . ."

"No fear, old chap. You know—" with a pathetic sort of pride— "I was a gentleman—once."

He looked at Foster; then put his hand over the other man's glass.

"Sounds funny—coming from me," he advised, "but—don't start in at this game. It doesn't get you anywhere. Head high—grit your teeth—swallow the injustices and carry on. It's the stage, Bob . . . and I rather fancy it's life as well."

Foster took the advice. He carried on.

For the rest of rehearsal he was the lone wolf, the Ishmael with everyone's hand against him, the actors, in their treatment of him, taking the cue from Cardoza.

He did not care.

"Children," he thought, "and monkeys. That's it. A cross between puling infants and gibbering

simians—with a dash of skunk to spice the human sum total!"

He worked harder than ever. So did the others.

For now the producer had changed his tune. He no longer sang lullabies and love songs. He no longer serenaded his cast. Instead he assumed the attitude and methods of the wild beast tamer; used the whip, the sting and bite of insult and irony—to all save Sally.

To an unfortunate Englishman, three months from the soft amenities of Drury Lane:

"Hey—you're supposed to be a gentleman . . . it'll take a bit of acting, I admit. Still . . ."

To McDonald Norris:

"Ever felt a real emotion in your life, Mac? What are you trying to impersonate. . . a young man in love—or a frankfurter . . . ?"

To the Richmond society girl who had sent him the birthday cake:

"Playing the part of a lady, aren't you? You've come to call on these people—in this scene—to call—damn it all—not to attack!"

To the girl who played the maid:

"You—you wouldn't be engaged as a slavey in a theatrical boarding house! You serve tea as if the guests were horses and you a stable groom!"

To Randall Phelps:

"Supposed to be a millionaire, eh? Millionaire—

hell! You're acting like a ham out-of-a-job who's holding on to his pants because he sees the instalment man!"

More to that effect. No one was spared; and Foster least of all.

Only Sally, throughout the hectic days, was treated as if she were spun glass. For by this time—and how history repeated itself—the Guv'nor was deeply, violently in love with his new star.

Yes. Love. Love itself. Or, at least, so he thought and really believed.

It made him feel young. No—he *was* young, eternally youthful, eternally the lover—this amazing old man. And Katharine Healy, sternly and sullenly watching from the side lines for the well-known, inevitable symptoms, shook her fine head.

She was angry—not for the first time. But, for the first time, she was troubled, worried about the outcome.

"If the girl's no good," she thought, "she can't harm L.C. It'll simply be a question, as it has so often been before, of Greek meeting Greek. But—if she's straight . . . the poor, dear old fool . . . how she'll make him suffer! God—after all I prefer hussies to decent girls . . . they hurt a man less."

Disturbed out of her usual course, her five o'clock quitting time routine, she began going to

rehearsals and to the studio afterwards—quite against Cardoza's wish, though he had not the nerve to tell her. For, occasionally, very late, after the cast had been dismissed, he took Sally up there to discuss the play, to go over certain scenes.

There, one night, Sally broke down a little; showed signs of fatigue, almost of hysteria, while Katharine Healy, on the gallery, listened, tense and stony-eyed.

Sally recovered a moment later; mumbled apologies.

"I understand," he said. "I've worked you too hard. But it'll be worth it. You have a glorious future. You will be the talk of Broadway, of America. You will be great, Sally Cameron, with the Guv'nor to help, to suggest, to protect and guard you."

He was silent; went on with a sigh:

"I wish I'd met you—thirty years ago . . ."

She laughed, a silver tinkle of sound in the dimly lighted studio, while upstairs Katharine Healy shrugged her shoulders, left the gallery, and stepped out on the tiny roof garden.

"Thirty years ago . . . ?" echoed Sally. "But I wasn't born then . . ."

"That's just it. That's—my tragedy! My tragedy that you are young—so young—and I am so . . ." he could not bear to say "old" and so he said instead: "so much older!"

"You—old?" She laughed again. "Don't be absurd, Guv'nor! You're years younger than I am! Your enthusiasm, your energy, your strength—it's youth incarnate!"

It was the finest compliment anyone could pay him. He flushed, well pleased, as happy as a child with a bright, new toy. He rose and went to the wall, pulled aside a silken Herati rug which hung there, and disclosed a wall safe.

This he opened with a small key—and brought out a little inlaid box. The box, too, with another, smaller key, with slow, rather reluctant ceremony, he opened, and drew from its velvet lining, tenderly, almost sorrowfully, a string of lapis lazuli beads.

He returned to Sally.

"My dear," he said, huskily, "this is—ah—my most secret, most precious possession. Not diamonds, nor pearls; not shimmering gold, cunningly wrought. Just beads—little blue beads. But once—" and his voice was like a sob—"once they belonged to Tessi —my Tessie . . . the little, little daughter I lost . . . the little daughter I cannot forget."

He leaned forward and, with surprising facility, clasped the necklace about Sally's white throat.

"Wear it—" he whispered—"wear it always—because I believe in you . . . because you make me so—so happy . . ."

Sally was deeply affected.

"Thank you, Guv'nor," she murmured; and, the tears running down her face, she bent and laid her soft cheek against his hands.

Not long afterwards, Katharine Healy came down the steps. Sally was just leaving, and the Irishwoman looked at her sharply—looked again, attracted by the blue sheen about her throat—lamplight reflected on a string of lapis lazuli beads.

"Good Lord!" she thought. "Has she got them, *too?*"

And, later on, to Cardoza:

"Do you buy those fool beads by the cartload, L.C.?"

He blushed.

"Be quiet, Healy!" he commanded.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

SO time went on, and rehearsals continued, and Katharine Healy watched Sally and Cardoza sharply, suspiciously, listening shamelessly to any talk she might overhear between the two. But without result. For he did not speak to the girl of love. He was sure, absolutely sure, of her untouched innocence, her mental and physical virginity; and virginity, while it had always attracted the sensualist in him, frightened, by the same token, the sentimentalist in him. This respect for girlhood—unblemished girlhood—was, in a way, his code; a code that, like most men with most codes, he might some day allow himself to forget. But not yet.

So he did not speak to her of love—in so many words. But there was always a caressing note in his voice; and often, with Katharine Healy looking on, sneering and dour, and with Foster's furiously observant eyes upon him, he touched her shoulder or her hand; and twice, by the playwright's actual, jealous count, he kissed her, lightly, on cheek or

brow, brushing his lips across her cool skin—as a father might do—but rarely does.

But the other actors received no caresses and certainly no kisses as the second week of rehearsal neared its close. There were insults instead, and the crack of the whiplash, and fits of terrible rage—outbursts which the Guv'nor rehearsed beforehand, upstairs in the studio, in the unconsidered presence of Deane Powers and Jack Griggs.

Thus, at midnight one day, having worked his cast until flesh and blood could no longer respond, he flung himself into one of his studied tempests.

"Cost me one hundred thousand dollars—this rotten play!" he yelled. "Not that I give a damn about the money. But the time I'm wasting—the heart's blood . . . and you—ah—you shirk, shirk, shirk! All you want is your pay envelopes! All you dream of is your foul, bestial pleasures! While I—I give up everything—I kill myself body and soul so that a bunch of damned hams can ruin my play—can ruin *me* . . . until all Broadway rises up to mock me, laugh at me!"

Steadily he cursed, his face deathly white; and finally—in a terrifying rage, a rage so carefully rehearsed and yet so well simulated that he deceived even Powers and Griggs who had watched that rehearsal in the studio, and deceived himself into the bargain—he pulled a watch from his pocket. He

slammed it to the ground. He jumped on it, stamping, grinding, until it lay shivered and shattered in a thousand powdered pieces.

There was complete silence.

Then he stumbled back a step. He looked at the ruin on the floor. He flung his arm over his eyes.

"Dear Lord," he said—and sobbed once . . . "my mother's watch . . . my dear dead mother's last gift to me . . ."

He trembled. It was superb. The entire company was profoundly affected. There were tears in Sally's eyes. Even Foster felt a stirring of sympathy, a pull toward the Guv'nor again—for a moment.

The latter looked up.

"Forgive me, children," he whispered, humbly. "I—I am my own worst enemy. Now—will you try—to work—for me?"

And they flung themselves into it, with renewed enthusiasm, while Cardoza pulled at Griggs' sleeve and spoke to him in an undertone:

"That went over big, Jack, eh? Get me another of those cheap nickel watches, will you?"

"You can't break your mother's watch twice in the same play, Guv'nor."

"I know. But—what about the next play?" asked the producer, his black eyes twinkling. "Jean Wick—you know, the authors' agent—sent me Pat Mul-

holland's new drama—seems good . . . oh yes . . . I may need another watch soon . . ."

And so, thanks in part to the late Mrs. Cardoza Sr.'s frequently smashed timepiece, the play went on, shaping more and more the way the Guv'nor wanted—and, therefore, becoming less and less the play that Foster had written.

This process the latter watched with glum alarm and helpless, uneasy rancor. He had no one to ask for advice. Sally, just then, was out of the question. The rest of the cast was too inimical to him as well as, by his standards, too unintelligent. And, chancing that Rita Andrews telephoned him one morning and asked him to drop in at her apartment after rehearsal, he went there, thinking that in her, at least, he would have an understanding listener.

She was lounging on a couch, in a marvellous suit of scarlet chiffon pajamas under a short, black satin jacket. Ruth Hoyt was there, too, very much at home, in filmy blue draperies and genuine pink pearls.

Rita motioned Foster toward decanter, glasses, and cigarettes.

"Know Ruthie, don't you? You don't? Meet the girl friend, then! And now, Ruth darling, run away and read the *Ladies Home Journal* while I talk to Bob about my play . . ."

"*Our* play!" suggested the girl friend quickly.

"What's mine is yours, and what's yours is mine. Beat it, kid! You're too distracting." Then, when Ruth had gone to the next room, Rita asked: "Have you a play for me yet?"

"No . . . and I never want to hear the word 'play' again."

"What's wrong?" she inquired. "Here—inhale a good hooker of hooch . . . good for your kidneys and your temper." She saw that Foster was terribly disturbed; was too shrewd to insist on talking about her own business. "Guv'nor been using the big stick?"

"He's ruined my play. A hard play it was as I'd written it—hard, straight American. But now—God knows what it is . . ."

"God may not know—but I do," she assured him. "Same old story. Guv'nor's been pepping it up I guess—putting a little sex in here and there . . . a dash of paprika—a squirt of perfume—a touch of mascara—a couple of sentimental moons and some stagey starlight and a whole lot of passionate bunk. Sure—I'm wise to that game. Just one of those things, you know. And—believe me—he'll end up by putting in a bedroom scene."

"You're kidding!"

"I am—like hell! That's what happened in *The Heart of Minnetonka*—bedroom set in an Indian wigwam! Why—he'd have a bedroom if he'd pro-

duce Joan of Arc! He's goofy about bedroom scenes . . . gaga about sex . . . that's what's the matter with the old devil."

She laughed; went on:

"That's why he took your opera, I bet. Liked the title—*Bedrock* . . . and now's he's busy cutting out the rock and putting in the bed . . ."

"I won't stand for it!"

"No—not if you've got a dime's worth of guts!" answered the forthright Rita.

A Rita who had guessed right.

For, on the next day, Cardoza, in his most paternal and friendly manner, suggested a bedroom scene to Foster; a scene in which Sally would figure to a considerably undressed extent.

"In the third act," he explained—"after the quarrel with 'Lester' . . . the curtain lowered for a few seconds to denote the passing of an hour . . . 'Harriet' on her bed, in her dark room . . . dark except for one ray of moonlight . . . baby spot bringing out the pristine whiteness of the couch . . . 'Lester' comes back—through the window . . . he sees her—his love, his passion rises high . . . he goes to her—kisses her . . . and so they play the reconciliation scene. Great, isn't it, Bob? Go ahead and write it!"

Foster stared at him.

"I won't!" he said in an even, cold voice.

"Eh?"

"I won't!" repeated the younger man.

He couldn't. He couldn't do it for the sake of the play, for the sake of his own artistic integrity —as well as for Sally's sake.

Cardoza looked him up and down.

"Your ultimatum?" he demanded quietly.

"Yes."

"No use arguing with you. If you won't write the scene, I'll do it myself."

"You won't! You've no right to!"

"Why not?"

"It's my play!"

"Also mine. We're collaborators."

"Even so—I refuse to give permission to . . ."

"Look at your contract," the producer cut in. "There's a clause you seem to have missed—a little clause which gives me the final decision in all matters connected with *Bedrock*."

"A crooked clause!"

"But—it holds!"

The Guv'nor paused. Foster stood there, sullen, defeated. The actors, inured to dramatics as they were, listened breathlessly. Sally was frightened and unhappy. Perhaps Bob was right. But, right or not, why must he be so obstinate? This one scene—what did it matter? It was partly because of her selfishness—her selfishness as an actress which put her

personal triumph in the play ahead of its artistic integrity—that she blamed Bob; and partly—in fact, chiefly—because of her love for him. For she wanted him to succeed; did not wish him to ruin his chance through pride and stubbornness. She tried to catch his eye; could not. So she stepped forward.

"Guv'nor—" she exclaimed—"please . . ."

He waved her aside. He pointed an accusing finger at the playwright. He spoke slowly; and every word, every syllable, every intonation, was a cold, deliberate insult:

"Shall I tell you what's the trouble with you? You've got no manhood, no passion! You've got no sap in your spine!"

Foster controlled himself. He replied, with biting sarcasm:

"You're hardly fit to judge. You see—you're the type who drags in sex by the hair . . . dirty, beastly sex . . . that's all you know!"

"What's wrong with sex?" yelled Cardoza, pale and trembling. "What's wrong with it? It's life—the glory of life! It's creation! It's truth and beauty! It's the driving power of all great dreams, all great deeds! Sex . . . ? Why—" his voice rose an octave—"I bet little Miss Sally knows more about life, sex, passion than you do—you poor, white-blooded son of a . . ."

Foster interrupted with a cry of rage. A single cry. High. Broken. Almost squeaky. Grotesque. Ludicrous. And terrible. The cry of a killer.

He sprang at Cardoza.

But immediately Griggs, Donaldson, and Powers, who had been drawing steadily and unobtrusively nearer, rushed in. They pushed him back. He tried to break away. But the odds were too great. Randall Phelps ran up to help, McDonald Norris, several others, holding him, pinioning his hands, interposing a living wall between him and Cardoza.

Came silence, swathing, complete, tragic.

Cardoza turned away. He brushed his hands together, and bowed deeply to Sally.

"My dear," he said, "I beg you to forgive me—for having used words in your hearing which . . . ah . . . but I had provocation—great provocation. This play—I'm doing it for you—for you! And Foster—he's trying to ruin it—on purpose—yes—because . . ."

"You're a God-damned liar!" shrieked Foster, struggling desperately to break away from the hands that held him.

"Am I?" thundered the Guv'nor. "And what about Rita Andrews? Aren't you making up to her? Didn't she ask you—ah, I know her!—to put the skids under this play if you can—because she is jealous of Miss Sally? Aren't you writing a play

for her—and the Playgoers' Guild? All right—go ahead—suit yourself! You'll come a cropper . . . and, as for the Playgoers', they'll be in the storehouse in another season. Work your own downfall! But—by the Lord God—I will not permit you to ruin my play—Miss Cameron's play!"

He was magnificent. Foster was white, frozen, silent . . . a silence because, actually, physically, with his brain dry and crimson and the vibrations in his heart making him dizzy, he was unable to utter a word—a silence which Sally misinterpreted.

Yes—she thought—Bob was writing a play for Rita! And the Guv'nor had spoken the truth—had spoken it . . . *again!*

The silence continued, heavy, sultry. It lay over the room like a sodden pall.

Then the Guv'nor turned to the company.

"Come on, boys and girls! Take up the scene from '*I love you, Lester—I love you* . . .' There, Miss Sally . . ." and, as she repeated the lines, her voice throbbing with a genuine if different emotion , he cried exultingly: "Bully! That's exactly what I want . . . fire—passion . . . Come on—" to McDonald Norris—"your cue . . . let go of Foster . . . *he* isn't dangerous . . . your cue . . . take it and be quick . . ."

And he broke into a stream of blasting invective against the juvenile, and—had he not remembered

just in the nick of time—almost once more broke his "mother's watch".

So the rehearsal—it was the second Saturday night—went on.

Foster had sat down in a corner, smoking cigarettes in an endless chain. He was staring, brooding. He felt physically crushed, bruised, numbed; and spiritually as well.

These actors—these capering damned fools in motley and bells—they were outside his pale, and he outside theirs . . . and Sally Cameron belonged to them . . .

Once Cardoza addressed him:

"You're not needed here . . . if you want to go . . ."

Foster did not reply.

With ironic amusement he watched the new scene, the bedroom scene, which the Guv'nor had put in; with the same ironic amusement he waited for the next thing that was going to happen to the play—no longer *his* play.

Midnight came. Rehearsal was over.

He went to the door, passing Sally near the threshold. They looked at each other.

He thought:

"If you loved me you would have shown it—before. You would have taken my part . . . if only by a single word—a single gesture!"

She thought:

"If you loved me you would explain—explain about Rita—if only by a single word—a single gesture!"

But neither spoke. He was proud and stubborn. So was she.

He went out into the night, into Broadway, peaking up incredibly toward the purple sky like the glow of a huge, lit circus tent, noisy as a brass band, full of rattle, shine, glitter, glisten, honk and whir . . . .

Broadway . . . he hated it; despised it; thought, childishly, intolerantly:

"To hell with it; it isn't America!"

He walked on. He felt terribly alone. Not a friend in the world to turn to. No one he could trust. No one in whom he could fully confide . . .

And then, suddenly, he thought of Katharine Healy. He had never ceased to be interested in her, to be curious about her. And he liked her. He thought her amazingly brilliant—and fair-minded. And she was fearless . . . he had heard her speak her unvarnished opinion to Cardoza more than once . . .

So, the next day, being Sunday and no rehearsal, he went to call on her. She lived in an old-fashioned, brownstone house near Gramercy Park, a valuable

piece of property, since she had always been a shrewd business woman.

A German maid let him in.

Within, the house was the antithesis of the studio in which its owner worked. It was a perfect, early Victorian milieu, complete in every detail from painted fire screens to wax flowers under glass. The one garish, though not incongruous note was struck by a couple of crimson-and-green, loudly screeching parrots.

In the sitting room Katharine Healy received him stiffly and with an air of indifference which cloaked her astonishment. They talked for half an hour. About nothing. Small talk which Foster flung desperately like a trivial ball and which the Irishwoman let drop.

Each was fencing, she for time and he for an opening, and finally he blurted out:

"I'm in a jam and need help."

"Oh . . . ?"

"You've seen what the Guv'nor's doing to the play. He'll ruin it. Someone must stop him . . . you have influence, Miss Healy . . . and you *must* help me . . . and then—" desperately, impudently, had he but known—"there's Sally . . ."

"Sally?" inquired Katharine Healy with a lift of an eyebrow. "What has she to . . . ?"

"I—well—" he felt uneasy; continued bravely—

"I love her. And she loves me . . . did, at least . . . no, no . . . still does! But—she believes in Cardoza . . . he has turned her against me . . . and all the rehearsal room, all Broadway is foul with gossip about them . . . everyone says that he's mad about her—that she has become . . ."

"Stop right there!" cried Katharine Healy, and rose to her full height and towered above him. "I know what you're going to say! I know what you think of L.C.! That he's a fake—and a rotten old man . . . I know! And it's true, every stabbing word of it! I know—who better? And I tell you this—" her voice deepened—"you waste your breath coming here to try and get me to use my influence—for you—against him! What do I care about you—or your play—or your girl? *He* matters—and nobody else—and I don't care what he is or does! I tell you—oh—I'd lie for him, steal for him, kill for him!"

Her ugly, bony face, at that moment, was handsome. Her violet-blue eyes were magnificent. Her hands were like fluttering gulls. And Foster, watching her, was taken out of himself. The man in him was moved, profoundly, by this display of raw passion; and the playwright in him thought: "God—what drama—what drama of life!"

"Ah—" she cried—"you and that baby-faced girl of yours—you would wreck him between you,

ruin him—if you can. But I shan't let you. I've seen him in victory and in defeat. I know him—damn him!—and I love him, hate him, despise him, adore him! I shall always love him—shall mend his poor, painted, broken toys for him—always, always! You—you young fool—you think you know something about love? You think you love Sally—that silly, decent, bedazzled youngster—don't you? Love—you don't know the beginning of it! Never dare to come to me for help—against Leo Cardoza! If you try to double-cross him I—I'll break you . . . yes—and the girl, too . . . and I don't care if you take to the gutter and she to the streets! I will *not* have Leo Cardoza hurt! I'll stand between him and harm with my own naked body! Love. . . ? You know nothing about it, Foster! I do! And now—" she ordered, very white and, suddenly, very quiet—"get out!"

She stood there, tragic, amazingly tall, a finger pointing toward the door; and he stumbled from the house and, turning down the street, he felt as if he had had a glimpse of hell—and a glimpse of heaven . . .

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

ON that Sunday afternoon, while Robert Foster was in Katharine Healy's house carrying his forlorn message to Garcia, Sally was having Ella Meadows in to tea.

The latter had kept her promise to the Guv'nor. She was running straight. But the struggle and the victory—a terrible struggle, terrible victory against drink and drugs and the sort of men she might still attract—had marked her face with deeper, more haggard lines.

"It was awfully decent of you to ask me," she told Sally, sitting there in the pretty little living room, the shades pulled down against the hot sun, the furniture cool and gay with chintz, and flowers —Cardoza's flowers—everywhere. "You see—" with a tinge of pathetic, rather self-defensive irony —"of late I haven't had much chance to—oh—to go out socially . . ."

"How many pieces of sugar?"

"Two." She took the cup. "Thanks."

"How do you think the play's going?"

Ella Meadows shrugged her thin shoulders.

"Hard to tell—during the rewriting process . . . and the collaborators quarreling all the time."

"I wish they wouldn't," said Sally. "Bob . . ."

"Oh—it isn't his fault."

"Of course it isn't!" Sally agreed, a bit violently. "But he's rash—shortsighted. The Guv'nor—well . . ."

"It's his theatre, his money, his production—I know—the old argument. And he *is* an extraordinary man. I'm so grateful to him—for the chance he gave me . . ."

"So'm I. Tell me, Miss Meadows—you think I'll do?"

"Of course you will. Why—in that second act curtain you gave me a thrill—and I'm a tough old trooper and . . ."

Just then there was the ring of the door bell, and Sally rose with an:

"Excuse me. I wonder who . . ."

Bob—she hoped. And it was not Bob, but Bradbury Smith who, as he had promised Foster, was calling to put in a word. He puzzled what he should say. Women didn't take readily to advice from outsiders—they considered it meddling—and a chance remark might turn her even more against the boy who loved her . . .

"I'm so glad to see you, Mr. Smith! I thought you'd forgotten me . . ."

"What an absurd thing to think . . . oh—" as he heard the clatter of cup and spoon—"you have company . . . ?"

"Just a friend. Come in, won't you?"

She took him into the living room, holding him by the hand; had started to introduce him when his hand grew ice-cold in her own, and he asked, hoarsely, incredulously, in a whisper:

"Eleanor . . . ? Not—Eleanor . . . ?"

Miss Meadows had risen.

"Brad . . . ?" she stammered; and the tears rose to her tragic, washed-out eyes, while Sally stood aside, astonished, embarrassed, uncomfortable.

Eleanor—she thought—the pretty, flighty young wife whom Bradbury Smith had told her about—who had run away from him . . . because she had thought him too sober—had thought him a bore—tedious, moralizing, stiff . . .

He moved forward and stopped directly in front of the trembling woman, but without touching her. An actor he was, straight through the tragedy, the real tragedy, in his heart, his life. He dramatized what did not need dramatizing. He used pathos and bathos, in his words, in the trembling of his hands. And yet—which, somehow, only in-

creased both the pathos and the bathos—the emotion was real.

"I've searched for you—" he told her huskily—"for years—all over the world . . . and now I've found you . . ."

"I wish you'd *never* found me!" came her choked answer—and she, too, played to the gallery gods in her heart; she, too, was pathetic in her sincerity.

So they played that scene—almost as if they had rehearsed it, waiting for cues, picking them up . . . for instance his quick rejoinder:

"Don't say that—for Christ's dear sake!"

"I wish you'd never found me!" she repeated. "Why—look at me—look at me . . ."

"I am looking at you," he said with a grave gentleness.

She put the back of her clenched fist to her mouth to stay its pitiful, ugly shaking.

"And what—" she asked, low—"what do you see?"

Again the question was as tritely melodramatic as lines in an old-fashioned Drury Lane play. Again it was the actress in her which made her say the words—or, rather, which made her use these particular words. But, beneath the pathetic, histrionic endeavor, was the real woman, a figure of genuine, not pinchbeck, tragedy; beneath the grease paint

was martyrdom, staring at the man with the awful, inexorable candor of sunken eyes . . .

"What do you see?" she repeated.

His answer was simple:

"I see—my wife. Yes—my wife . . ." he reiterated, as if to reassure himself.

He took her in his arms. A storm of emotion shook her frail body until she was like a helpless creature in the grasp of some overwhelming, elemental violence; and Sally stole out of the room, the tears wet on her cheeks.

"Brad—" said the woman—"you divorced me . . . ?"

"No."

"Why not?" She broke into hysterical laughter. "Why not? I gave you plenty cause, Brad. There was Marston first—you remember Marston?—then others . . ."

"Shut up!" he commanded savagely. "I don't want to know!"

"You must know! It is your right, your duty! Men there were—and drugs—and drink . . ."

"Drink? Don't I know that road! I who have traveled it—who am traveling it now! But—I'll quit—I'll try to—I'll try my damnedest—now that I've found you again. And when your engagement with Cardoza is over, we'll find work—together. We're old, dear. But the stage is our life. Ah—"

with the unconquerable, marvellous, tragic optimism of the actor—"we'll make the grade yet—you and I!"

"You—" she asked, not quite believing—"you'd take me back—after what . . . ?"

"How can I judge? Why—" said this old man—"I love you!"

"And I love you!" replied this old woman.

He kissed her mouth. Not with the kiss of youth, the kiss of passion. But with the kiss of love, the kiss that forgives while it sues for pardon.

They sat there for a long time, talking, talking. Not of the past. Never again of the past. But of the present and the future. And—of Sally, and of Robert Foster.

"Those two kids are on the wrong track," he said. "The same old story—jealousy, pride, misunderstanding . . ."

"I know. I've watched them."

"That's why I came here—to say a word to her—diplomatically . . ."

But when, just then, Sally returned, he decided to throw diplomacy to the winds.

"Sally," he told her, "my wife and I have lost years of happiness because we were both headstrong—because neither would give in. Don't you make the same mistake, child!"

That was all. But Sally understood; and, when

the two had gone, to adjust themselves, to pick up the broken threads of their lives and reknit them, she thought:

"He's right. Of course he's right. I've been a fool —and Bob another."

When, the next day at noon, she went out on the back stage alleyway and sat down on the doorkeeper's narrow bench to get a breath of moderately fresh air, she beckoned Foster to follow her; and follow her he did, with that curious, masculine mixture of reluctance and eagerness.

She told him about the meeting between Bradbury Smith and the woman who called herself Ella Meadows.

"That's bully!" he exclaimed.

"Isn't it? They had a lot to forgive each other— and they did it so quickly. That's real love. I—" she went on in a low voice, covertly watching his face—"I wish *I* had real love!"

There was only one thing for him to say. He said it:

"You *have* real love! Mine!"

"I know. And I love you, too. We've been so foolish—haven't we?—quarreling over nothing . . ."

That "nothing" was a mistake. The word jangled a discord among Foster's tense nerves. He stiffened. He had been too hurt and too humiliated of late

to wipe the slate clean immediately. Besides, he was young enough to enjoy, in a way, certain peccant, austere self-torments, and seemed to welcome martyrdom with a rabidly wrong-headed ingenuity.

"Nothing?" he repeated. "Call Cardoza's attentions and all that rotten gossip about you and him —nothing?"

"For heaven's sake—are you going to start all over again?"

"Of course not. But you must admit I had provocation."

"I admit nothing of the kind. If you can't believe me," she replied, with rising temper, "I shan't stoop to explain."

"I see . . ."

"You don't!" she cried, seeing him drawing away from her, with his face estranged and shut against her like a fist. "And—what about yourself? You haven't owned up to *me* yet!"

"About . . . ?"

"Rita Andrews—the play for her!"

For she still believed that. Cardoza had said it, Roy Hartley, all Broadway.

"It's a lot of poppycock," he defended himself.

"It isn't poppycock. I don't begrudge her a play by you." Here she was not entirely honest, since she was jealous of Rita Andrews as a woman as well

as an actress. "It isn't that. But—there must be clear truth between you and me."

"I've told you the truth," he insisted. "Rita—" and, at once, Sally noticed his careless use of the Christian name—"Rita wanted me to write a play for her. I mentioned it to you before. But I haven't written a line on it, nor ever shall nor . . ." He interrupted himself when he saw her make a little grimace, and went on: "Don't believe me, eh? Well—you would—if you loved me!"

And she answered, entirely feminine in her logic —or deliberate lack of logic:

"And you would tell me the truth—if *you* loved *me!*"

Just then there was the boom of the gong; Deane Powers' call: "Come on, boys and girls!" rehearsal once more; and Sally and Robert Foster entered the theatre without another word.

Again they had reached an impasse. Life, she decided, life of the emotions, was a complete failure. The only life worth while was the life of the intellect, of stage ambition and success; the life—by a natural process of reasoning—which Cardoza offered her.

She crossed the threshold and walked up to him.

"Going to work with me tonight, after rehearsal, Guv'nor?" she asked, making sure that Bob could hear.

"I'm looking forward to it, child." And in a sibilant whisper—he, too, making sure that the playwright could hear—he continued: "You inspire me! Ah—what a fortunate day it was when you came to me! You see—I need you, Sally!"

Often during the next days, his black eyes fevered with a secret thought, he used the same phrase: "I need you, Sally!"

He was growing more and more restless and keyed up with increasing, throbbing desire for her; was beginning to forget his self-imposed taboo against untouched girlhood, to throw himself into the part of ardent lover. Yet never the impatient lover, speaking his mind directly. He must go slow —he told himself—until she had made her first, triumphant success under his banner; until, excited, exalted, she gave herself to him, out of gratitude, of her own, free will.

So when he said: "I need you, Sally!" he was careful of his intonation.

If she interpreted the words as having to do with the theatre, the more impersonal side of life, he would let it rest—for the time being; if she took it personally and did not retreat from him, he would shift his position at a moment's notice and open his arms to her. But—he must go slow. He must not make a mistake through impatience.

Still, it was hard on him to go slow. It grew harder every day.

"I need you, Sally," he said again one night, at her apartment door, with Griggs biting his nails in the car down at the curb. "I need your pure flame to warm my cold life . . ."

He paused.

"Go slow, Leo!" he warned himself; and he smiled—his benign old, paternal smile—and added:

"You and I—Sally—against the world!"

He pronounced the words with a thrilled enthusiasm. He left without waiting for a reply; and, through the half-open door, Emily Garrod heard—and laughed . . . Emily who had been to a vaudeville show and supper, who had had several cocktails, and was not the usual, discreet chaperon.

She was still laughing when Sally entered, smiling a little, rather touched, rather flattered.

"What's so funny?" she demanded.

"Funny? You—and—" for the third cocktail had had a dash of absinthe—"the Guv'nor! Ah—" and Emily hiccoughed, a most shocking and illogical sound, given her thin face, her gray, tightly screwed hair, and the silver-and-amethyst cross on her sunken chest—"good old Guv'nor . . . never forgets his lines . . . same old lines—same old Guv'nor—but—different lill' girl—pretty lill' girl . . . oh—" with a second, tremendous hiccough,

and a quotation from the vaudeville show she had seen that night: "Pretty lill' girl—going, going, gone . . . sold to the gentleman with the handsome, pink whiskers!"

Sally was annoyed.

"You—heavens—you're drunk!" she exclaimed. "Go to bed!"

But, somehow, the proper chaperon's alcoholic stammerings were more of a warning to Sally than Robert Foster's remarks and all the insinuating gossip she had heard about the Guv'nor; and, back at work the following morning, she was for the first time on her guard against him, caught herself weighing his every word of praise and flattery, his every low-voiced aside.

It made her angry—at herself.

She tried to dismiss it as imagination and nonsense; tried to argue that she was getting evil-minded . . . the usual, slimy Broadway influence, she supposed. And—oh—what a fool Cardoza would think her if he knew—what an ungrateful, silly little fool!

So she endeavored to fight against her growing suspicions; and the main reason why she fought was vanity—the sort of vanity which caused her to think:

"I know him! I know him better than all the rest put together!"

And still her suspicions persisted, increased, as, night after night of the last week, he had her up in his studio under the pretense of special rehearsals for her alone; as, night after night, his suggestions became a little more marked and the paternal gestures a little less obvious . . . with Katharine Healy hovering about somewhere, mostly on the gallery, nervous, anxious, almost frantic with fear —not for Sally, but for Cardoza.

She knew him. She could tell by a dozen small signs. He was getting impatient, taut to the breaking point, almost unable to stand the strain.

And she was right.

For, that Thursday, past midnight, when as always he took Sally to her apartment, he asked for the first time:

"May I come in—a little while?"

She was utterly worn out.

"Please—I'm dead tired—almost asleep on my feet . . ."

He accepted this edict and took her hands in his own to imprint upon them the routine kiss. But it was a kiss of longer duration than usual, and he turned her hands over and touched his lips to the soft palms.

"Good night," he told her with evident reluctance. "Saturday is dress rehearsal. And then—soon, soon—our triumph—yours and mine, dear! Rest,

little Sally—and dream—of success—and, if you will, a very little—of me . . ."

And then, as he turned to go, he said again:

"I need you, Sally!"

He added:

"I need—all of you—body and soul! I cannot live without you!"

He left; and she stared after him, her brain echoing his parting words:

"I cannot live without you!"

Love—was it? Or, if not love, the need of her?

He—needed . . . *her?*

He, Leo Cardoza, needed her, Sally Cameron?

There was flattery in the thought of his need for her. And there was, quite naturally, temptation. For she was young and ambitious; and he was Broadway's favorite son, a man who had it in his power to make her famous, to make her secure and envied, to put her above all other women on the American stage.

Too, she liked him. She liked him very much. And—she was grateful to him . . . and now:

"I need—all of you—body and soul!"

She gave, suddenly, a little shudder. She told herself that—yes—he wanted his pound of flesh—that's what the "needing" meant—his one hundred and seventeen pounds of flesh, to be accurate.

What should she do . . . ?

She was alone; alone except for Bob, the man she loved, the man with whom she had quarreled, who had estranged her from himself. . . . Bob—a young man . . .

And again she gave a little shudder.

Yes—Bob was young—and the Guv'nor was old.

She had called him "young" once. Had meant it. He *was* young—a white-haired Peter Pan—in spirit, enthusiasm, inspiration. But physically he was old, old, old . . .

Repulsive—because of his age?

No. Not exactly repulsive.

Even so—what of it?

Certain medicines were repulsive, caused one's gorge to rise. But one swallowed them when the doctor ordered, even got used to them.

Perhaps it would be the same thing with Cardoza—the old man—the old man's desire and passion . . . ?

She speculated. She visualized—a little shocked at the pictures in a back cell of her brain, a little excited.

The thing Cardoza demanded . . . such a little thing for searing hunger to ask for . . . and yet so precious to him . . . and—was it precious to her?

Why was it precious?

A mere physical detail—meaningless . . .

Why let it stand in the way . . . ?

So, once more, temptation came to her. She owed Cardoza so much. She was ambitious, lonely, and young enough to use all the catch words, all the trite sophistry about sex morals; telling herself: "The things of the flesh cannot affect the spirit"—and: "Standardized morality is an invention of the majority, and the majority is always wrong"—and: "If you don't hurt anyone but yourself, what does it matter?"

She was quite pleased at herself for putting it in such a neat and, she imagined, novel way.

"Yes—" she repeated in her mind—"if I don't hurt anyone but myself, what does it matter?"

And then, again, she thought of Bob. She'd be hurting him, not herself.

Hurting?

A very inadequate term.

She'd be sacrificing him, crucifying him upon the altar of her selfishness.

And so, that night, there was her struggle: gratitude to Cardoza, admiration for him, ambition—against her natural, physical shrinking from him and her honest, genuine love for Robert Foster . . .

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

ON the following evening, after rehearsal downstairs was over, Cardoza and Sally were together in the small studio.

She had not wished to come, again pleading fatigue. But he had insisted, rather curtly:

"We've work to do."

He stared at her out of his black eyes. His face, she thought, was as though bleached white with many years, many tempers, many passions.

He was on the point of forgetting his self-imposed taboo. His nerves were frayed, and his somber, brittle vanity was dangerously ruffled as, subconsciously, he felt her trying to glide away from him. He was growing anxious for Sally's capitulation, not only because of his desire, but also because of his self-esteem. He could not afford to be turned down by her nor outwitted—he, Leo Cardoza, who had taken women when and how it pleased him and had discarded them by the same system . . . who had made women famous overnight and infamous.

Therefore, in the urge of his vanity and his de-

sire, he dropped his mask; dropped it cleverly; began by criticizing Sally's ability as an actress.

"Look here," he said suddenly, walking up and down the room, "you're all right in the first act and splendid in the second. But in the last—in that scene which I wrote for you specially—you—well—you're amazingly bad."

She was astonished and hurt. It was the first word of adverse comment he had given her.

"Oh—" she stammered—"Guv'nor . . ."

"Amazingly bad!" he repeated.

"But—you've told me I was good . . ."

"I tried to encourage you—with praise. But dress rehearsal tomorrow. We're on the eve of battle—with the public . . . and—may I be outspoken?"

"Please!" she murmured in a flat voice.

"I'm worried—about the final curtain—that love scene with 'Lester'. Let's rehearse it. I'll play the juvenile."

She rose and started with her lines, shakily at first, but presently gaining power and confidence. She was really excellent, convincing as she exclaimed:

"I love you, Lester! Why do I love you. . . ? Oh—it is so hard to put into words. But—well—I guess—because I belong to you—because . . ."

"Stop!" cried Cardoza abruptly.

He was gradually working himself up to a big

scene, a scene not of the theatre except in so far as the theatre was his whole life, a scene that had accomplished results before this.

"Sally," he went on, "you—oh—you're terrible! Are you a child—or a woman in love? You exhibit no emotion. You're like a mechanical doll. You show no passion, no fire, no ardor. You shrink—when you should invite, accept, surrender . . ."

She shrank now in good earnest as his voice peaked shrilly and then dropped almost to a whisper; as he came nearer to her, his face pale and twitching, his hands extended, demanding hoarsely:

"What's the matter with you? Are you a stick or a stone? You give no illusion of reality. You know nothing of passion . . . so how the hell can you expect to portray it on the stage? Oh—" as he saw tears in her eyes—"never mind the waterworks! Take up your cue with: '*Why do I love you . . .* ?' Come on! Snap into it!"

She repeated the words with now, indeed, about as much emotion as the average brakeman would squander in ordering a ham sandwich.

"Stop!" he cried again. "Same lines!"

Once more she spoke them, worse than before.

Once more he cried:

"Stop!"

He advanced upon her with clenched fists.

"You're as lifeless as a piece of boiled cod!" he

raged. "I'll not permit it! I'll not let you ruin my play! You shall awaken—to flesh and blood—if I've to kill you to make you . . ."

In the past, at such moments, it had been his own cue to seize his stars by their flowing hair, and drag them about the studio a bit, for the sake of realistic art. The fact that Sally's hair was short acted rather as a damper for a second. But he thought of another, similar technique. He came closer, took her by the shoulders, and shook her violently.

"Iceberg!" he shrieked ludicrously. "Block of wood!"

"Guv'nor!" she implored, frightened, trying to free herself; then, turning angry: "Let me go!"

But he held her in his hard, pitiless grasp.

"The stage is life—a portrayal of life!" he panted, his breath hot on her cheek. "Life—you're living it—not dreaming it! You're a woman—a flesh and blood woman . . . not a damned statue! Say the lines again!"

Somehow she managed to gasp them, feeling not at all like a rising, emotional actress, but like an angry and bewildered young girl in a situation that was absurd as well as dangerous. She was worse than ever—and "Fool!" he yelled abruptly, and struck her across the face.

He struck her lightly enough. For he had no

wish to mark her—not with dress rehearsal imminent. But the glancing blow was enough to transform her into a small, red-haired fury.

She thrust out both her hands and pushed him away with all her strength so that he staggered and fell back against a carved Spanish chair which overturned with a crash. She advanced upon him, quite fearless now, her eyes blazing.

"I hate you!" she told him, sobbing with rage. "I despise you! I don't care if the play never goes on! I never want to see you again!"

And she was utterly taken aback when the Guv'nor, regaining his balance, clapped his hands and cried:

"Bravo, little Sally! That's it! That's what I want! Fire, emotion . . . any kind of emotion . . . hate does as well as love . . . only indifference, apathy, is impossible!"

Suddenly he took her in his arms. He pressed his lips on hers in a moist, brutal kiss. She tore herself free; ran away. He caught up with her. Again his arms were about her, this time from the back, his hands clutching her young breasts.

"I love you!" he whispered. "I want you! You are mine, mine . . . the red hair, the white skin, the cool, slim youth with the fires beneath . . . ah—" in a mingling, sinister and ludicrous, of genuine passion and of theatricality asking for applause

—"fires that I, alone, know how to awaken!" Frantically she struggled, while he continued: "Say the lines once more, Sally . . . but say them differently . . . say: *'I love you, Leo—I love you—I belong to you . . .'*"

Once more she tore herself free.

She stared at him, in silence.

A second passed; two; three.

Then she spoke, in a curiously passionless voice: "You silly, vile old beast!"

And, without hurrying, she left the studio, while he stood there as if turned to granite.

"You silly, vile old beast!" she had said . . . and he thought of Ruth Hoyt, thought of Rita Andrews.

Rita had called him old.

So had Ruth.

And now Sally. . . .

Was it . . . could it be . . . ?

He shuddered. His heart beat as if it would burst. The blood pounded in his temples.

He gave a single cry, choked, strangled: "Oh . . ."

And, upstairs, Katharine Healy heard. She came running down the gallery steps as he fell into a chair—sick, defeated.

She had not to be told what had happened. She knew.

She bent down. She tried to lift him up.

"L.C.!"

He made a gallant effort.

"Damn it all, Healy," he said, his lips blue and twisted—"I—I picked up my cue too soon . . . and I overacted—like an amateur!"

He fainted. She looked for and found the remedies she always kept near at hand for just such a slight heart attack as this. She called a discreet doctor; called Jack Griggs; and between them they got Cardoza into bed.

Presently the doctor and Griggs left, and she remained—for the rest of the night. She sat beside the couch and watched Cardoza, his face and hair white, his black eyes closed, but his breath coming more evenly.

Hour after hour she sat there, on a straight, low chair, her chin in her hand, her elbow on her knee, and looked at him—and despised him—and loved him—and hated with every fiber in her being the girl who had defeated him.

"L.C.," she said once, as dawn broke and he turned and opened his eyes and smiled to see her there, "you're a bad boy—but I love you."

And he answered as he had answered before:

"You're the only one who does, Healy."

She did not reply; and he continued violently:

"By God—I'll break her for this—I'll ruin her—her and her damned young fool of a lover!"

"What'll you do?"

"I'll throw the production!"

"Don't talk like an imbecile. It has cost you too much."

"Money means nothing to me," said Cardoza, truthfully. "And there's Pat Mulholland's new play . . . a peach of a play—with a little rewriting . . ."

"Keep quiet!" she ordered him.

But she watched him all the more anxiously. She knew, even better than himself, how deeply the scene with Sally had humiliated him! She knew how he would brood upon it, how he hated her. Pat Mulholland's play . . . ? Quite fair. But a play that demanded a great, emotional actress. And—whom had he . . . ?

It was time, she considered, that she took matters in her own capable hands.

So, dress rehearsal having been called for noon, she sent for Griggs to take her place as guardian of the sick room for the rest of the morning, put on her fantastic hat, and went to Rita Andrews' apartment.

Rita received her with well concealed astonishment while Katharine Healy, sitting stiffly on the edge of a chair, looked the younger woman up and

down—the whole, attractive, satin pajamaed length of her.

Then she spoke slowly:

"I'll come right to the point. We have been enemies—you and I . . ."

"I'll tell the cockeyed world we have!" laughed Rita. She lit a cigarette; offered the case to the other. "Have one?"

"No!"

"All right. What's on your chest?"

"I need you. Mr. Cardoza needs you."

"Sure he does. But—I don't need him."

The Irishwoman flushed. But she restrained her anger.

"It'll be worth your while."

"And—he sent you—to me?"

"He doesn't know—must never know—that I'm here."

"Well—what's the big idea, Miss Healy?"

"The Foster play . . . the Cameron girl . . . he's disappointed in both."

"Disappointed? Horse-feathers! The kid's turned him down cold—and now the old buzzard's on the warpath, I take it?" Rita guessed shrewdly.

"Take it any way you please. Now—as to you—there's a rumor you're going to the Playgoers' crowd . . ."

Rita nodded, but made no comment. She had

already approached the Playgoers' Guild. But the earnest young men who ruled its destinies had replied they were sorry—terribly sorry—but they had no play which would do justice to her genius; a diplomatic way of telling her that they had no use for her.

So she listened now, intently, as the Irishwoman went on:

"Take my tip, and stick by Mr. Cardoza. He'll get you a play and a good one. You see—to put my cards on the table—he'll have to make up his losses if *Bedrock* should fail . . ."

"It'll fail all right, all right."

"Maybe. At all events—think it over. Come to dress rehearsal today—and talk to him."

"He'll kick me in the ear."

"I don't think he will. You'll come?"

"Sure." Rita rose as the other did. "You aren't such a bad old scout, after all."

She held out her hand, but Katharine Healy ignored it.

"It hasn't been easy," she said. "But—he needs you."

She went out, and Rita stared thoughtfully at the door.

"She's an old jackass!" she thought; and then: "A damned fine old jackass! Sticking to him all these years . . . brilliant and bitter—and he'd be

lost without her—and what thanks does she get? It's beyond me," admitted Rita, puzzled and, strangely, a little envious. "Gee—but it must be worth *something* to her . . . or she wouldn't do it . . ."

She began dressing.

"Well—" she said aloud, standing before the mirror—"I'll play the old girl's game for her. It's my game, too, after all. But Ben Levi'll have seventeen fits when he hears what sort of contract I want!"

An hour or so later, she went to the Cardoza theatre, found an inconspicuous seat in the auditorium, and watched the curtain go up on *Bedrock.*

"Another good play gone wrong," she decided, while scene after scene was rehearsed and re-rehearsed, with Leo Cardoza, who was once more his own self, showing no sign of the heart attack of the previous night, directing.

"He's in fine form!" thought Rita impishly.

For he was riding every last actor and actress, and the one who came in for most of the blame was Sally Cameron—who worked on, doggedly, bravely, tight-lipped.

After she had reached home she had sworn to herself that she would not appear for rehearsal. Her contract could go to hades! The Guv'nor could sue her; complain to Equity . . . she didn't

care. But after a while her pride and her loyalty had come to her rescue. Bob's play. She couldn't let Bob down. Besides, she couldn't let Cardoza see that he had defeated her.

So she had appeared on time, white and unsmiling, and was now taking, as all could see, a most outrageous ragging and bullying.

"She'll never make the grade," thought Rita. "Too nervous. He's got her up in the air a mile. Poor little devil!" For she was sorry for Sally now that she no longer feared and envied her.

She saw Foster in the row ahead of her, rose, and sat down by his side.

"Rita!" he said, in amazement.

"Herself in person. Say—this used to be a good play . . ."

"Used to be is right."

"The Guv'nor's put it through the sausage mill, eh?"

"Yes . . . damn him!"

"Never say die," Rita told him cheerfully. "He isn't the only producer on Broadway. By the way, with half a chance that Cameron kid could make good. But she hasn't the temperament to stand the Guv'nor's expert sort of heckling. Listen!"

The third act love scene had been reached. Cardoza was sneering:

"What's the matter with vou, Miss Cameron?

Have you water in your veins instead of blood? Love! Don't you know what love means? A little life, please—a little action . . . and don't swallow your words! Emotion! Show some emotion! I know that you must have some—somewhere . . ."

"I—I don't understand it!" complained Foster. "Why is he treating her like this . . . ?"

"Don't understand?" Rita smiled. "I do!"

"You're rotten, rotten, Miss Cameron!" cried Cardoza; and Foster whispered:

"He's a bloody swine!"

"Granted!" agreed Rita. "Know what I'd do if I were you?"

"Well . . . ?"

"See the kid later—and have her weep on your shoulder . . . that's what she needs."

"She won't have anything to do with me."

"That so?"

"She thinks I'm writing a play for you and the Playgoers' . . . thinks I've been disloyal . . ."

"Oh—it'll all come out in the wash," Rita told him; and, intermission being announced a moment later, she went back stage and walked up to Cardoza.

"Lafayette, we are here!" she greeted him.

They eyed each other warily. Greek was meeting Greek.

He smiled; was silent; and she went on:

"What about . . . ?"

"What about what, my dear?"

"A play for me?"

"I think I have one," he replied; and, in that moment, their differences were tacitly adjusted. "I'll let you know soon."

"See that it has a good part for Ruth Hoyt."

Cardoza did not believe his ears; and Katharine Healy, who was hovering near, started and listened closely.

"Ruth?" he demanded incredulously. "Playing second to you? But—she's been a star—*my* star . . ."

"That doesn't matter. She'll come running when I whistle to her."

"But—she's a wretched actress . . ."

"That doesn't matter either—as long as she isn't the star. I'll see to it that she doesn't disgrace you . . ."

"But . . ."

"It'll amuse me to have her around—on the stage—and in my dressingroom . . ."

"Floozy!" cried Katharine Healy.

"Floozy!" echoed Leo Cardoza.

They spoke almost in unison, while Rita Andrews strolled away to Sally's dressingroom, opened the door without ceremony, and found the other girl huddled at her table, her arms flung out and

her head upon them, and Foster leaning over her, awkwardly patting her slim shoulders and trying to comfort her.

"I'm a failure—" she was sobbing—"a failure . . ."

"Tell it to the marines, kid!" came Rita's light voice, and she walked in. "I'm Rita Andrews," she explained.

"Rita—Andrews . . . ?" Sally lifted her tear-stained face. "You—" she cried childishly—"you've come to—oh—to gloat over me!"

"Don't be a melodramatic little idiot," laughed Rita. She drew up a chair and sat down. "Look here, kid . . . you've just had a bum break—sure—but why take it out on me? Think your boy friend here is writing a play for me? Well—he isn't. Just gossip . . . and I did my little bit to spread it because the Guv'nor's been pig-headed lately, and I wanted to get his goat."

"Perhaps that *was* gossip," Sally admitted. "But he—the Guv'nor—he told me Bob wanted another girl to do my part . . ."

"I didn't!" interrupted Foster.

"Sure he didn't," said Rita. "I know the Guv'nor . . . all he was trying to do was to put Foster in wrong with you, Sally. He was trying to make you —the old bozo—wasn't he . . . ? Pulled the old

caveman stuff on you—last night—from what I can guess—eh?"

Sally nodded, and Foster went white.

"I—" he cried—"I'll kill him . . ."

He rushed to the door. But Sally caught his sleeve.

"Please—Bob . . . no, no . . . I—I guess it was my fault as much as his . . . I was so—so conceited—misreading his interest in me . . . so blind . . . he—he was so kind at first—so fatherly . . ."

"You aren't the only one who's fallen for that game," said Rita, her superb eyes clouded. "Me—I was wise from the start. But I wanted to get ahead. I'm hard-boiled—and I love the stage and love nothing else. But you're different, Sally. You're about as hard-boiled as a poached egg. You—" continued Rita—"you'll get on, too—because you've got talent. But it won't be with Cardoza. He isn't your meat—and I guess by this time he knows that you aren't his. Come on, you two kids! Kiss and make up!"

She smiled briefly at Foster, touched Sally's outstretched hand, and left.

Sally was silent; and Foster said huskily, humbly:

"She's right. Let's kiss and make up. I love you, darling—so much . . ."

"And I love you, Bob!"

He took her in his arms. He kissed her mouth, her ears.

"To the devil with all our resolutions!" he said. "We can't get on—alone. We need each other. Marry me, Sally, as soon as possible. We'll show them—you and I—against the world!"

The very words which Cardoza had used to her, a few nights earlier. But she had forgotten that. She echoed gallantly:

"You and I—against the world!"

She returned to rehearsal, encouraged, happy, inspired. She worked as never before. And Cardoza noticed, wondered, cursed. What had happened to put life, emotion, passion, and power into her reading of the lines . . . ?

Once he had hoped that *he* would happen.

And now . . . ?

Was it—Foster?

Foster—of course!

And so, for all his silent admission of her good performance, he had no word of praise for her. He roared and bullied; was ironic and insulting by turns.

"The sticks—that's where you belong, Miss Cameron! The petroleum circuit! The broad, open spaces where men are men—and actors are hams!"

"That's not fair!" shouted Foster, goaded beyond all patience. "Miss Cameron is doing beautifully!"

"She's not!" yelled the Guv'nor. "As an actress she'd make a good waitress in Childs! And as for you . . . what business is it of yours? Are you directing or I? She's bad enough—but the play is worse!"

"The play was all right," replied the other, "until you ruined it—until you prostituted it with your rotten craze for sex, sex, sex!"

The rest of the company was aghast. One or two snickered faintly. The Guv'nor had been told off sure enough—had it coming to him, too. But—the Guv'nor was their bread and butter. Better not let him see how they felt. Better take their cue from him.

So, during the remainder of the dress rehearsal and at its inglorious, hectic conclusion, they avoided Sally Cameron and Robert Foster—all, that is, with the exception of Ella Meadows.

She did not fear Cardoza. She feared nobody, for the first time in years. For, though slowly, hurtingly, with occasional relapses, she was coming back, mentally, spiritually, physically. She hoped, for Sally's sake, for Foster's sake, that the play would be a success. But, should it fail, well . . . she was an actress, selfish through her very pro-

fession . . . she would be sorry, very sorry . . . but it wouldn't be her funeral . . . and there was her husband . . . yes . . . she and her husband . . . the two of them—"against the world!"

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

MONDAY evening found the company in Atlantic City for the tryout, the opening of *Bedrock.*

There was here the boardwalk with its tramping, tramping feet. There was the throb and pulse of the surf. There was, far on the horizon, a sloop showing white and brave and adventurous against a peacock-green strip of water.

But, otherwise, Atlantic City did not differ much from Broadway, since, after all, Broadway had built it in one of its extravagant, typically American billion-dollar vacation gestures. The juggled, nervous men and women were the same. So were the strident voices, the speak-easies, the honking, hooting motorcars, the trite, second-rate vices, the desires blurred or bestial, the whole human and inhuman kaleidoscope.

Even the huge, hiccoughing, stammering electric signs were the same. They advertised everything from Mary Pickford to Chewing Gum, from Packard to Bull Durham, from Ziegfeld to Paris Garters.

They dripped glistening splotches of red and blue and silver on the boardwalk; and, amongst them, above the door of the Apollo theatre, it read:

Sally Cameron
in
Bedrock.

Yellow, this sign. Rather modestly winking.
But the announcement that topped it—

LEO CARDOZA PRESENTS

—was more than a wink. It was a shout, a bragging exclamation in glowing, purple bulbs.

It was the showman, the spieler, yelling electrically:

"Here you are, folks! Come on! Come on! Swellest entertainment of the century, ladies and gents! The Guv'nor himself! For two nickels—a dime—a thin dime!"

Of course the thin dime turned out to be three dollars plus thirty cents tax. But the crowd was eager to pay. A Cardoza first night. A theatrical event.

A number of people had come from New York to be present at the birth—or death. Some had come for business reasons.

For instance several ticket speculators.

They were now in the lobby, talking in undertones.

"Hello, Milt!"

"How they coming, Tom?"

"Put in your bid for a block of tickets—for the New York run?"

"New York run? Well—you can't always tell . . ."

"Eh?" asked a third. "Got any dirt about the Guv'nor's new opera, Milt?"

"Oh . . ."

"Don't hold out on us, Milt! Aren't we all in the same racket?"

"All right. Listen. I had a little talk with Jack Griggs."

"The Guv'nor's wet-nurse?"

"The same. And he let on to something . . ."

"Jack Griggs—let on? Cut the comedy! He's as close-mouthed as a Scotch clam!"

"Not today he wasn't. Guess he'd had too much to drink. Anyway, he slipped me a tip . . ."

The voice dropped low. There was a sharp whistle; an astonished:

"You don't mean it!"

"That's what Jack said!"

"I'll be damned!"

"Well—we'll watch and see . . ."

"Sure."

"Come on. Overture has begun."

The overture could be heard back stage, in the dressing rooms, where trembling hands were applying final touches of rouge and powder and mascara; where superstitious hands were toying with rabbits' -feet; where pious hands were fingering rosaries; where Sally's slim hands were crushed in Foster's strong hands.

"Don't you worry, dear heart," he said. "You'll be splendid."

"You're the cream in my coffee"

blared the orchestra; and in the wings Cardoza, leaning against a dusty pile of scenery that had seen service in *Ben Hur,* tapped his small feet in rhythm with the music, smiled like the cat that has eaten the canary, and motioned to Griggs.

"O. K., Jack?" he whispered.

"O. K., Guv'nor."

"You were discreet?"

"I'll tell the world I was." He laughed. "I guess Milt must have thought I was plastered. I'm going out front now."

"You told Herman?"

"He's there now—third row . . . and Bruce—and a couple of the boys."

"You know exactly when . . . ?"

"We need no cue, Guv'nor." He hesitated. "Only . . ."

"Well . . . ?"

"Are you sure—quite sure you want to . . . ?"

"Shut your mouth, Jack! I know what I'm doing!"

"Curtain going up!" announced the call boy, hurrying from dressing room to dressing room; and curtain up it was—on the first act—Robert Foster's first play—Sally Cameron's first chance as a star.

Fair enough, that first act. Nothing exciting. But fair enough.

"Rotten!" thought Robert Foster, watching anxiously from near the door. "The Guv'nor's fault . . . forcing me to add cheap situations, cheap lines!"

Sally did well. Mild applause here and there. Only there was a good deal of coughing in the audience—from the seventh row where Jack Griggs was sitting, from the third where Herman Hesse was with two of the office boys, from one of the boxes where Bruce Donaldson was enthroned in lonely Caledonian glory—coughing, loud and disastrous, while on the stage low-voiced, important lines were being spoken, and once or twice a snicker at the wrong moment, and indignant peo-

ple turning and sibilantly whispering: "*Shsh!*" which made matters worse.

Mild applause, too, at the end of the first act. Three curtain calls. There might have been four or more if, with the Guv'nor in the wings, still smiling, whispering to the man who handled the curtain rope, it had not stuck and refused to budge.

Sally went to her dressing room. She passed by the producer. They had no word for each other or look.

He turned to Katharine Healy who had come back stage.

"Not exactly a triumph, eh, Healy?"

She stared at him. Her reply was indirect and significant:

"Going to work with me on Pat Mulholland's new play tonight, L. C.?"

"Yes. Send a wire to Pat. Ask him to be at the studio—at noon—day after tomorrow."

"Very well."

The second act was a repetition of the first. Fair. Just fair. And again the coughs, the snickers, increasing, growing. A certain restlessness, a certain uneasiness in the audience. Shuffling feet. Rustling programs. Whispers.

And, after the second act curtain, the Guv'nor still in the wings, smiling, smiling, and out in the

lobby the ticket speculators chewing cold cigars and exchanging confidences:

"Jack was right, eh?"

"Sure, Milt."

"Funny the Guv'nor let the play go on . . . that he didn't see during rehearsals . . ."

"Well— he ain't the Pope in Rome."

"Maybe the third act's a wow."

"We'll see."

But the third act was not a "wow." It was a fiasco.

This fiasco happened toward the end. Sally was playing the emotional scene which Cardoza himself had written. The public, in the beginning, was eating up the scene . . . oh yes—the Guv'nor was right . . . Broadway, and the section of Broadway called Atlantic City, was all for spicy lines and sex and a yellow baby spotlight turned full force on a white bed.

And Sally was doing her best; was almost winning out—against odds, against the ever growing wave of coughs and snickers from the third row, the seventh row, the stage box.

So she reached the climax. She came to the line:

"*Why do I love you. . . ?*"

And then, suddenly, there was a loud laugh. That was all. It was one of those fat, amorphous cachinnations bloated with hollow indifference.

There was in it neither hatred nor dislike, nor even disapproval. It was just an empty sneer—Jack Griggs' sneer—translated into tone waves.

A woman caught the laugh, in mid-air as it were. She played with it, shrilled it into her own language, and tossed it wide into the audience.

The audience laughed. They laughed as a whole, as a mass.

"Why do I love you . . . why—oh—why . . . ?" yelled somebody.

More laughter. Then a man commenced hissing. He hissed with his tongue curled against the palate of his mouth, in a sharp, zumming rhythm which amused the mob.

Others joined in the hissing chorus. They whistled. They cat-called.

"Ring down the curtain!" yelled Cardoza, back stage. "Ring down!"

Thus *Bedrock*—Foster's first play, Sally's first real chance—was wrecked in a gale of laughter and hisses and cat-calls. It was a complete flop, opening on a Monday night, closing on that same Monday night, never to see New York except, somewhere near the East River, the storehouse, that graveyard of theatrical hopes and ambitions and while the dejected actors stood about in groups, muttering and complaining, against the play-

wright, not against the producer, the latter entered Sally's dressing room.

He found her still in her make-up, her hand in Foster's.

"The play," he said coldly, "is a failure—thanks to you, Foster—and thanks to you, Miss Cameron."

They did not reply. He left, went to the hotel, and was joined there by Ben Levi who mourned loudly:

"Fifty thousand bucks shot to hell, Guv'nor!"

"Which leaves us another fifty thousand, the rest of Julius Beck's loan, to produce Pat Mulholland's new drama. It's sure-fire . . . with Rita Andrews in the title rôle . . ."

He turned to Griggs:

"Put through a long distance call to New York, will you? I want to talk to Rita. And telegraph our publicity department—let them notify the newspapers . . . we'll go into rehearsal almost at once."

And so, by the middle of the week, the Cardoza theatre hummed again with work and enthusiasm and high expectations, while Broadway, the Astor lobby, the Algonquin, the *Friars* and *Lambs* and *Green Room Club* buzzed with gossip.

"Say, Jake—that last flop—that Foster flop—didn't feeze the Guv'nor much, did it?"

"Not him! He's a tough baby. He's started in on

The Secret Woman—Pat's new play . . . starring Rita . . ."

"And Ruth Hoyt's going to be in the cast, I see in the papers."

"I'll be damned!"

"What sort of show is it?"

"The usual Cardoza tripe, I guess . . ."

"Fake passion and fake lawlessness, eh?"

"Sure. With a bit of sugar-pap here and there . . ."

"And twin beds, I guess."

"The old sinner sure has the box office recipe . . ."

"Like that bird I wrote scenarios for at the Coast," chimed in a playwright. "I suggested a historical drama for one of his stars. And know what he tells me . . . ?"

"Well . . . ?"

"He tells me: 'Legs is box office. And rape is box office. And mother love is box office. And Jesus is box office. But history is—nix!' "

Laughter.

Then somebody asked:

"What was the trouble with *Bedrock?* The real trouble, I mean . . . ?"

"Listen—I got the low-down from Roy Hartley who got it from Rita. Seems the Guv'nor and

Foster fell out over the Cameron skirt. The Guv'-nor pulled a hell of a boner with her . . ."

"I get you, Tim! Kiss whom you please, but please whom you kiss—that's *his* Sundayschool motto."

"Seems he didn't please her so damned much—and they tell me Foster socked him a Dempsey in the jaw . . . and the old devil threw the play out of revenge."

"What happened to the Cameron?"

"Back in the sticks, where she belongs, I guess."

But Sally was not back in the sticks, but back at Mother O'Neill's.

"You see," she told the fat old woman, "I didn't make the grade."

"Sure—and you'll make it yet. You've all the time in the world."

"Can I have my old room?"

"There's a ventriloquist in it—and he's out of work, and never a cent of rent does he pay. But you can have Mr. Smith's room—he's set up housekeeping with his wife . . ."

Sally moved in that afternoon, and in the evening Robert Foster called on her. He took her out for a walk, to Central Park, and there they found the bench where they had sat on the night of their first meeting, where they had told each other their high hopes and glittering, selfish ambitions.

Hopes and ambitions now dimmed—a little—not too much.

"I'll finish my new play within the month," he told her.

"Going to offer it to the Playgoers' Guild?"

"Nowhere else. In the meantime I'm all right—financially, I mean. That one-acter I did for Bradbury Smith caught on—nets me seventy-five a week . . . and he's got three months' solid booking in and about New York."

"I know. He's offered me a part in it . . . the girl who played the ingénue is leaving him."

"Going to take it?"

"You bet, Bob. I'll get something better after a while."

"I'd like to see them try and stop you."

They were silent. Then he spoke abruptly:

"I love you, Sally."

"And I love you!"

"We made a mess of it, you and I, when we were apart—when we were 'free.' Suppose we . . ."

"Yes, Bob. Let's!"

"I wonder where one gets a marriage license . . . ?"

"Downtown somewhere . . ."

"I'll find out—first thing in the morning . . . and then, sometime tomorrow . . ."

"Yes—" she smiled— "sometime tomorrow. No use waiting. I'm tired of being free."

"So am I, dear."

Prosy enough words. But, to them, amazing words, holding truth and beauty and brave destiny; and, sitting there on the bench in Central Park, about them the pungent, cosmic smell of the brown earth, they felt as if they had lived all the years of their lives to reach this one particular moment.

They found the license bureau the next day, found a little church, and six strokes of a clock hung loose and soft in the still air when they walked up the steps of Mother O'Neill's boarding-house and told her they were married.

The old woman took them into her capacious, cloyingly perfumed embrace.

"The Saints be praised!"

"About that room of mine—" said Sally, rather weakly— "do you think Bob and I can . . ."

"Sure you can! It's big enough for two—and—" with a bawdy, bellowing laugh— "more power to you both!"

So, with certain of their day dreams ended and with new dreams begun, Sally was playing the three-a-day with Bradbury Smith in Newark, Jamaica, Long Island City, Yonkers, and up-town New York vaudeville houses, while Foster finished his new play at fever heat.

Toward the end of the month he took it to Philip Wertheimer, the leading spirit of the Playgoers' Guild, a young man not much older than Foster, with a leonine head reminiscent of the late W. J. Bryan, scholarly Harvard spectacles, scholarly Harvard intonation—and the keenest nose in the world for the genuine on the stage.

He fingered the blue-bound script rather reluctantly; asked:

"Another Western drama, I suppose—like . . . ?"

"No!" interrupted the playwright. "Not like *Bedrock*. You saw it?"

"Yes. I watched the try-out—in Atlantic City."

"Well—this play is quite different. It's New York," explained Foster. "Not the New York of Broadway or Fifth Avenue. But under the L stuff —white collars and cheap radios and delicatessen meals and help-me-do-the-dishes-so-we-can-go-to-the-movies . . . I—think it's real . . ."

Philip Wertheimer looked up, more interested.

"Very well, Mr. Foster. I'll read it."

"Soon?" came the eager question.

The other smiled.

"Very soon. Tonight."

"And—one other question—if you should like it . . ."

"*If!*"

"Well—if you *should* . . . I've written a part —a young girl part which . . ."

"Which you want your wife to play. I suppose it's the lead?"

"Yes."

Philip Wertheimer laughed frankly.

"I saw Miss Cameron—that time in Atlantic City . . ."

"You think she . . . ?"

"She was excellent. Oh—" as the other was about to speak— "you don't have to tell me. You see—I may be Harvard, and I may wear horn-rimmed spectacles. But—I'm quite human. I, too, know Broadway. I, too, read Roy Hartley's column. I, too, hear gossip and rather enjoy it. Au revoir, Mr. Foster. I'll let you know in a day or two."

He did. He had read the play. So had his co-directors. They were enthusiastic about it, considered it important and timely. They would put it into immediate rehearsal—and Sally Cameron was going to get her second chance.

"If she makes good," promised Philip Wertheimer, "we'll star her in the biggest electric lights to be had for love or money."

And so, later in the season, there were two plays on Broadway, and each was a sensation—*the* sensation.

The Cardoza theatre. The Playgoer's theatre. Facing each other on Broadway.

And, as they faced each other, so did they challenge each other with the twinkling and stammering of their purple and green and red electric bulbs.

One sign proclaimed:

LEO CARDOZA PRESENTS
RITA ANDREWS
IN
THE SECRET WOMAN
THE HIT OF THE SEASON
BY
PAT MULHOLLAND.

The other one stated:

THE PLAYGOERS' GUILD PRESENTS
SALLY CAMERON
IN
THE WALKUP
THE HIT OF THE SEASON
BY
ROBERT FOSTER.

And once more Broadway hummed and buzzed, the busy beehive, drones and workers, gathering on street corners.

"Say—the Playgoers' got a wow . . ."

"Turning 'em away every night. The piece is good for a year's run."

"You've sed it!"

"It's the berries, all right, all right."

"Same with the Guv'nor's opera. S. R. O. there, too."

"He sure hits his homers."

"The Babe Ruth of Broadway—that's what he is!"

"And putting on a new play soon—Deane Powers tells me."

"That so?"

"Yes. The Guv'nor himself has written it—with the help of some poor unknown. Deane tipped me off to drop in some afternoon. Big cast—he says . . ."

"What's the title?"

"*The Image in the Heart.* Costume thing, I understand. Your legs are pretty good yet. Why don't you drop in, too?"

"Guess I shall. Who's the lead?"

"Never heard of her before. She's one of the Guv'nor's new finds. Girl named Peggy McNamara —Roy Hartley tells me."

"Any dirt?"

"Oh—the usual. You know the Guv'nor."

So they gossiped, while Leo Cardoza was up in his studio, glancing with studied carelessness at the

week's box office statement which had been handed to him by a temporarily smiling contented Ben Levi.

"All right, Ben. And tell Deane to come up. I want to talk to him about the new play . . ."

The business manager coughed. The smile left his face.

"Guv'nor . . ."

"Well . . . ?"

"This new play—a costume play . . . it'll cost a hell of a lot of jack . . ."

"Shut up, Ben! It's *my* theatre—*my* play! Get out before I kick you out!"

Ben Levi shrugged his shoulders and departed; and Katharine Healy looked up from the typewritten pages she was reading.

"What do you think of it, Healy?" asked Cardoza.

"Pretty fair."

"It's more than fair! Didn't I write it myself —most of it?"

"Very well, L. C. We'll call it more than fair. Have you anyone in mind for the lead . . . you know, the play will stand or fall upon that one part."

He did not reply; and she went on:

"How about Polly Ralston? You might be able

to get her away from the Morris crowd . . . I hear her contract expires shortly . . ."

"No good," said Cardoza testily. He flushed a little under the carefully applied powder. "The part calls for an Irish type."

"Jane O'Hara," suggested Katharine Healy, staring at him with rising suspicion.

"No."

"Kitty Malone?"

"No, no! You see—the fact is," explained the Guv'nor, nervously, guiltily— "the fact is—as I told Deane a day or two ago—I've found just the girl for the part."

"Oh—" threateningly— "you have, have you?"

"Yes. She's doing a bit in Brander James' play—*The Lucky Break*—you know. I—" he continued enthusiastically— "I saw her the other night. The very type we need, Healy. She's coming here this afternoon . . . a wonderful little actress—young, lovely, talented, pliant . . ."

Katharine Healy looked at him.

"Floozy!" she commented, with weary resignation.

Then she smiled.

"Thank God that you're yourself again, L. C.!" she added.

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